

JESS OF
HARBOR HILL

RAMIE A. SHERIDAN

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"WHAT IS IT, JESS? WHAT IS IT?" ASKED THE
LIGHT-HOUSE KEEPER HOARSELY.

Harbor Hill Romances

JESS OF HARBOR HILL

BY
RAMIE A. SHERIDAN

AUTHOR OF "THE PRICE OF A HEART," ETC.

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HARBOR HILL ROMANCES

By RAMIE A. SHERIDAN

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JESS OF HARBOR HILL
THE PRICE OF A HEART

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JESS OF HARBOR HILL

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JESS OF HARBOR HILL

CHAPTER I

A MYSTERY OF THE SEA

SLOWLY the old man came down the winding stairs of the lighthouse, with pauses, now and then, because of the rheumatic twinges, which so twisted his genial, wrinkled face, that it looked like a withered apple trying to laugh.

"It's got a pretty good grip on me t'-day," he murmured as he reached the bottom step. "A—ouch—pretty good grip! Ah-a-a-a! Um!" He looked into the sitting-room, where the rag carpet defied the bright sunlight to fade its many stripes.

"Jess!" he called.

"Coming, Daddy Jed!"

Invariably, when strangers heard the voice of Jess Blowden, they either turned to catch a glimpse of the speaker, or if they were already looking at her, they waited until she spoke again. For there

was a youthful joyousness, a crispness, a sparkle, a lithesomeness, yet withal a caressing fullness, in the tones which seemed to speak of sparkling sun on the ocean waves, and a lively breeze whipping the crests into salt spray. And when Jess laughed——

“Jess! I say, Jess, where——”

“Yes, yes, Daddy! I’m coming,” and the girl swept hurriedly into the room, shutting the door of an inner apartment after her. There was something in her manner that attracted the old man’s attention.

“Jess, Jess,” he spoke with mild reproof. “You’ve been puzzlin’ over that paper again, now ain’t ye—own up—ain’t ye?”

“Now, Daddy Jed, you know——”

“Yes, Jess, that’s all right—it’s all right, but why can’t ye let it alone? What’s the good of delvin’ back into the past? You’ve got me, an’ I’ve got you—thank the Lord! Ain’t that enough? Or, Jess, maybe now that you’re growed to a woman—an’ a handsomer one there ain’t along this coast—maybe now you’re a woman growed, ye begin t’ feel that Daddy Jed ain’t——”

She crossed the room in a soft swirl of garments, and her arms went about the old man’s grizzled neck—her full, soft, rounded arms—and they seemed to caress the shrinking, shriveled figure.

"Daddy Jed!" she whispered, "now you mustn't say such things!"

"Yes—yes—Jess! I knowed you wa'n't tired of me; I really wa'n't goin' t' say it, yet when I've come down from the lantern two or three times lately, I catch ye in your room, an' ye come out of it in such a hurry when I call ye, that I know ye've been lookin' over that paper once more. It can't do any good! I tried—tried hard, when you was a wee mite of a baby, and I picked ye up from the sands, not knowin' whether ye was a big crab washed in by the tide, or a lump of sea-weed. That's right, one of them fat crabs! Ye was all curled up in a lump, an' in yer little red hand was a piece of paper—jest a piece of paper—an', as I say, I tried real hard, ever since you was a baby, t' try t' decipher it."

"And you never could, Daddy?" she spoke softly, gently now, almost as to a child, and she remained standing near him, with one arm still around his neck.

"No, Jess; never could make head nor tail of it. Neither could Hank Stickleton, an' he's had quite some education. So we give it up, an' I jest took ye in, an'—an' I've kept ye ever since. An' now you're a woman growed, an' you're tryin' your hand at the mystery—the mystery of the sea. Don't ye know, Jess, gal, that the sea hates t' give up its mysteries? Don't ye know, that when them salt waves gits holt

of a thing, they likes t' keep it?" He swept his hand toward the tumbling billows seen from the light-house window.

"Yes—I—I know, Daddy. You've been more than a father to me—a mother, too—no one could do more than you have, and you needn't fear that—that I want to go away. Go away—away from here—from you? I couldn't—even if the mystery was all cleared up, and I knew who I am—who she was!"

She looked, rather than motioned, toward a little spot on the hill back of the light station—a little spot, grass-grown, and under a gnarled tree—a spot where kindly daisies nodded—a spot marked by a small stone.

"It all came to naught—all to naught," murmured the old man. "I tried t' learn what th' paper meant, so what's th' use of you tryin', Jess? Have ye—have ye a new clew t' anythin'?" He looked anxiously into her calm face.

"No, Daddy. Only, sometimes I just can't help going in there and looking at it—wishing I could know what it meant, and whether—whether she *was* my mother," and, once more she looked toward the grave, where nearly two decades ago the body of a woman—little more than a girl—had been laid to rest, after the sea had given her up, the same night when Jess was rescued from the waves.

The old man slid to an easy chair, piled with many cushions, and, by dint of grasping the arms and balancing himself, he managed to sink down into its depths without too great a strain on his rheumatic joints.

With a sudden whim Jess returned to her own room, which opened from the living apartment. When she returned she held in her hand a small frame, such as might contain a photograph. But it was no picture at which she gazed so earnestly.

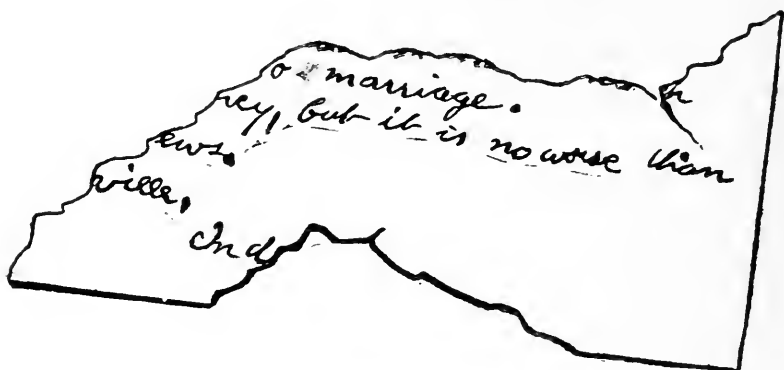
Under the glass was a torn scrap of paper—a paper the ink of which was faded by time, and stained by sea water. It was crinkled and creased—for it had been taken from the tiny hand of Jess that stormy night eighteen years ago, when her spirit so nearly went out on the wings of the ocean blast.

“Bring it here, Jess gal!” called the old man. She held it in front of him, and they both gazed at it, neither speaking for several seconds. Then Jed Blowden murmured:

“Yes—that’s it—hain’t changed a bit in all these years, though it has got a spot of molasses on it, where Hank Stickleton was puzzlin’ over it down to his store one night. But it’s jest the same. Read me what it says, Jess. I mislaid my specks, somewhere—never did see such specks fer gittin’ mislaid as mine be—not in all my born days!”

She read the few words, slowly, softly.

The paper was but a fragment, torn, evidently from some letter, and all that remained was this:



"Yes, that's exactly what I made it out t' be, that night arter I picked ye up an' rushed over t' Aunt Aurelia's with ye in my arms, all drippin' wet, an' you jest about breathin' an' that's all," murmured the old lighthouse keeper. "How Aunt Aurelia ever managed t' bring ye around, I never could fathom. There must be a powerful sight more virtue in catnip than *I* ever give it credit fer! But, anyhow, here ye be, an' if my own daughter Mollie had lived, I couldn't love her more'n I love you, Jess."

"I know it, Daddy Jed." Her hand was upon his whitened hair now.

"Yet ye keep porin' over this mystery," persisted the old man, who seemed strangely insistent. "Jess, you—you haven't——"

He paused, and looked at her in some alarm.

"No, daddy, don't think that I've gotten on the track of it," she answered, and there was something like a sigh in her words. "I've puzzled over it, too—many a night. But it's not because I want to leave you, Daddy. I only—I only want to *know*."

She looked eagerly at the paper, preserved under the glass.

"See!" she exclaimed. "It is evidently a part of a letter, Daddy."

"That's what Hank and I allowed," he remarked softly, rubbing his rheumatic leg.

"What it says, except that it refers to some marriage, I can only guess at," she went on. "But it is the ending that interests me. Look—it seems to be the last part of a name—as if some one had signed it."

"That's what Hank and I allowed," he answered, as if there was no getting beyond this.

"And this other part—the 'ville'—is the name of some place."

"Aye, aye," he answered dreamily, seaman fashion.

"And this last part, 'Ind', that is——"

"India!" fairly shouted the old man. "India! That's what it is. Me an' Hank puzzled over that for a long time, until he got down an old geography,

an, we looked over all the places on the map, until we struck India, an' then we knowed we had it.

"But, Jess, India is a terrible ways off—an' I'm glad of it, too; fer I'm sure ye'll never go away off there an' leave me. It's a terrible hot place, too! An' it's full of alligators, an' man-eating tigers, and nobody wears any clothes there. Scandlous! Hank an' me allowed it was, when we read about it in the geography book. Ye wouldn't want to go there, Jess, would ye?—even if—even if ye found ye belonged there?"

Again he looked up anxiously into her face.

"No, Daddy Jed; of course not. But did it ever occur to you and Hank Stickleton, that 'Ind' might stand for something else than India?"

"No, I don't know's it ever did. What else could it stand for?"

"For the State of Indiana."

"The State of Indiana—out West, you mean?"

She nodded.

"It can't—it can't be," he murmured.

"And the 'ville' part—that might be for Evansville. Oh, Daddy, that came to me the other night—I couldn't sleep. I got thinking about it. I got up, lighted the lamp, and pored over the geography, just as you and Hank did, years ago."

She paused.

"Then what?" inquired Jed eagerly.

"Then I saw this place—Evansville, Indiana, and I thought—I thought maybe I—or she—might have come from there. So I wrote a letter——"

"You writ a letter! Who to?" He was sitting upright now, the pain of his rheumatism forgotten.

"To the postmaster there. I asked if he had ever heard of any one from his city being lost at sea—with a little baby, such as I was at the time. Any one whose name ended in the letters 'ews.' That's what I wrote about."

"And—and did ye git an answer, Jess?"

He seemed to choke over the words.

"Yes."

"What—what did it say?"

"Nothing, Daddy Jed; nothing at all. The postmaster didn't know. So you see the mystery of the ocean remains just the same. The sea doesn't want to tell, I guess," and she gazed wistfully out of the window to where the surf tumbled on the beach of the lighthouse cove.

"No, the sea doesn't want t' tell, thank God," murmured the old man. But Jess did not hear him. She was looking down at the framed scrap of paper, crumpled by a baby's fist, and stained by the sea water. As she moved toward her room with it, there sounded from without a series of shouts. Then came a crash, and a noise as if a gun had been fired.

Jess ran to the door and peered out, shading her eyes with her hand.

"Look, Daddy!" she cried. "Quick! There's been an accident!"

"An accident! Where, Jess? Oh!" he cried out, as a sudden spasm of pain wrenched him, but he hobbled to the door.

"See!" exclaimed the girl. "It's an automobile! Coming across the new bridge over the inlet! They've had a smash! Some one is hurt! I'll run and see if we can help!"

She laid the framed paper on the table, and darted off.

"They ought to have a doctor!" called Jed after her. "They allers needs a doctor in all the auto smashes I've read about! I'll git th' doctor, Jess."

"Here he comes now!" she shouted, waving her hand to indicate some one approaching from the rear. "You stay here and tell Ralph to hurry over. I'll go and see if I can do anything. Tell Ralph to hurry!"

Jess was running now, her lithe limbs taking her over the hard sand at a good pace, for Jess *could* run.

"An accident!" murmured the old man, in a sort of daze. He turned to watch the approach of an ancient horse, drawing a more ancient carriage.

"Humph! Ralph Hammond could walk about as

fast as his nag takes him," spoke the lighthouse keeper. Then, raising his voice, and sending it through an improvised megaphone formed of his two hands, he called:

"Hurry up, Doc! Auto accident at th' new bridge! Jess has gone down!"

Dr. Ralph Hammond started from his day-reverie at the words. The whip came down on the flanks of the easy-going animal. Startled, it broke into a canter, and, in a few minutes, the physician was at the scene of the wreck.

On one side of the sandy road was the figure of a man, with his leg bent up under him in a sickening manner, while his head was bleeding in a way that indicated more than a simple cut. Beside him was another man, his clothes torn, and his face scratched. He was standing there, looking on dazedly and awkwardly, while Jess Blowden knelt beside the wounded autoist, holding his head, and bathing his white face with her handkerchief, wet in a basin of water brought by a woman from a nearby house.

Dr. Ralph was out of his carriage in a jump, and was opening his surgical case while he spoke a low word to Jess, and then, looking up at the swaying figure of the other man, he asked:

"How did it happen?"

"Confounded differential went out of business

just as we crossed the bridge, and we ran into the stone wall. Is he—is Harry much hurt?"

"I don't know. I'll see. Can you help me a bit, Jess?"

"Yes, of course, Ralph; blood doesn't frighten me."

"Sensible girl! You'd better sit down," this to the other man, who was swaying. "You'll keel over in a minute, if you don't. I'll see to you presently."

"Thanks—guess I will," was the answer thickly. "I got a knock on the head, somehow." He moved over toward the wrecked machine in something of a daze, and sat weakly down, while from several directions there streamed the seafaring folk of Harbor Hill, to whom an automobile was a rarity, and the smashing of one something that had never been seen before.

"Now, Jess, if you'll just hold the basin so, I'll see what this cut on the head amounts to. Um—broken leg there, sure enough," and Dr. Hammond took hold of the arm of the girl, to indicate where he wanted the basin held.

As Dr. Hammond touched her Jess turned, quickly, shyly, almost as if to question the necessity of his so directing her, and she seemed about to turn away, when something in his look—an honest answer to her own unspoken question—reassured her. She smiled, then blushed, and in that simple

act there passed into her life the tenor of his manliness, while to him the blush on her cheeks seemed the color of life.

For Dr. Ralph Hammond was a man's man. He was tall, strong, bronzed by the sea, and his hair seemed to have in it something of the glint of the sun on the sands, as it clustered about his head, and curled, just the least bit, over his forehead. There was a flush upon his own tanned cheeks as he bent to his work—a flush not alone of exertion—though he had hurried at the call for help.

Once more he looked at Jess, and she returned his gaze. Then she glanced down at the still, white face of the wounded man.

CHAPTER II

"I'M GOING TO STAY HERE!"

"UGLY cut," murmured Dr. Hammond, as he sponged back the hair, letting the water drip into the basin which Jess, without the least sign of squeamish terror, held steadily. "I'll have to take a few stitches in the scalp. Are you game, Jess, or shall I call——"

"Go on," she answered, with firm lips.

"There's Mrs. Neal," he went on; "though I'm afraid she wouldn't stand it. But here comes Daddy Jed," he added, as he saw the lighthouse keeper slowly approaching.

"I don't mind in the least, Ralph. Didn't I once tie up your finger, when you almost cut it off in the mowing machine?"

"That's so." He glanced momentarily at a scar on his right hand—the hand that was now so deftly closing the gash on the head of the unconscious man.

"There, that's done," he announced, after a few minutes. "Now for the leg. That isn't going to be

so easy. Here, Gideon, lend me a hand. And you, Hank, stand on this side. Reuben, get ready to slip that board under him when I give the word." The men addressed stepped awkwardly forward. Dr. Hammond pulled the leg from beneath the man's body. The women who were gathered about shuddered, and one or two gasped. Jess, with a slightly paler face, moved over to where the other man had taken a seat on the grassy bank.

"Wouldn't you like some water?" she suggested.

"I would—thank you very much, but I didn't want to bother while they were fixing up Harry. I can wait. Poor fellow! It's my fault. I knew the car wasn't in good shape, and I insisted on taking it out. It's my fault, yet I didn't think the differential——"

Jess had walked away in the midst of his explanation. She had noted that both men were well dressed, with the quiet elegance of wealth. The wounded one was rather stout, with a full face, and a complexion that betokened good living. The other was somewhat more refined in appearance.

"It's awfully good of you," the man murmured, as Jess came back. "I wonder what they're going to do with Harry? It's too bad to be caught in a—in such a lonely place as this," he corrected whatever he had intended to say. Jess rather thought he had been going to compare Harbor Hill to a "hole." He drank the water, and handed back the glass. As

he did so, his fingers touched those of the girl for an instant. He started, and looked up into her eyes, but, at his glance, Jess turned her eyes away, not that his gaze held anything but respectful admiration, but there was an eager intensity—a start of surprise, as if the man had unexpectedly found something he had not expected to see.

“I’ll inquire about your friend,” Jess said, as she walked away. “Don’t get up. You don’t look able.”

“Oh, I’m—I’m all right!” he insisted. “I can walk——” He arose, staggered weakly forward, and, with a little, half-ashamed laugh, sank down on the grass again. Jess watched him a bit anxiously.

“That other man needs some treatment, too,” she spoke in low tones to Dr. Hammond, moving quickly to where the physician stood.

“Yes, I’ll attend to him presently. I must set this leg, yet I can’t do it very well here. He ought to be carried somewhere. If my office wasn’t so far——”

“Take him to the lighthouse!” suggested Jess quickly. “We have plenty of room, and you can work there.”

“Yes, Doc!” urged Jed Blowden. “Bring him right along. “I’ll go back, an’ git a couch ready fer him downstairs. I oughtn’t have left th’ light

so long, as it is. Bring him along," and he hobbled back toward the station.

Dr. Hammond went back to where the little throng stood around the recumbent figure.

"I think we will take him to your place, Jess," said the physician. "It may be imposing a little on you, but Mrs. Blodgett's house is too small, and if we took him to Samantha Neal's she'd talk him to death the first day." The doctor, by a gesture, indicated the two nearest cottages. "I think, after I set his leg, that we can move him. His friend is all right. Perhaps he can fix up his machine, and go on. He says he'll hire an auto ambulance and take this man to the Portaby hospital."

"Oh, he oughtn't to be moved any more than can be helped, with a broken leg. He can stay at our house."

"But, Jess——"

Dr. Hammond paused indefinitely. He had seen a look the wounded man had flashed at the girl, and it made him vaguely uneasy.

"Oh, I shan't mind in the least, Ralph. Neither will Daddy Jed. But how are you going to get him there?"

"The men will carry him on a door, with a mattress on it. He'll ride comfortably."

"Did they tell you their names?" asked Captain

Josiah Turnell, a grizzled old sea-dog, as he pushed his way into the throng. "That feller over there," and he nodded toward where the one to whom Jess had given the water was examining his car, "that feller over there looks like one that was out this way fishin' last year."

"I don't know whether he was ever here before or not," spoke the physician. "That one," and he nodded toward the one with the broken leg, "is Harry Matthews, and his friend is Ford Newton. They are from Boston, and have been touring for the last two weeks. Ah, here comes Simon with the door."

The doctor, Jess, and some of the others had moved slightly away from where the wounded man lay, as they talked. Dr. Ralph now approached him, to assist in placing his patient on the improvised stretcher. Newton, leaving his machine, came toward his friend again, having hurried over, as soon as the dizzy feeling left, to inquire about him.

"Put the door down right here," directed the physician. "All lift together. Easy, men."

The color went out of Matthew's face, as they lifted him up, but it came surging back when more stimulant was administered.

"You'll be all right in a little while," consoled the doctor. "Walk slowly, men. I'll be there ahead of you. Jess, will you ride in the carriage?"

"Hadn't you better take him?" She motioned toward Newton.

"That's so. I forgot I had two patients."

He watched the men carrying Matthews, and saw that they could manage him.

"Can I give you a lift over to the lighthouse?" the physician went on, addressing the owner of the car. "I'm going to set your friend's leg there, and I'd like to look you over."

"Oh, I'm all right. I was just trying to see if we could move the car, but we can't until it's repaired. No, I can walk over to the lighthouse, thank you. Poor Harry! Do you think there's a chance to move him—after you set the leg?"

"Possibly. I can tell better in a few hours, if no fever sets in. The injury on his head isn't a slight one, you know."

"That's so. Well, I——" He paused. Jess was looking at him. Visitors, such as he, seldom came to Harbor Hill, less often to the lighthouse. Newton smiled slightly at the somewhat eager face of the girl. Dr. Hammond saw it, and frowned momentarily.

Newton looked down the stretch of beach fronting the little town of Harbor Hill—a quaint, old-fashioned place on the Atlantic coast, ten miles from Portaby, which latter municipality boasted of itself as a "city," and where one could get trains to New

York or Boston. From the little group of houses, which, together with a general store, a mill, a blacksmith shop, and a little white church, constituted the village of Harbor Hill, the gaze of Newton traveled to the lighthouse.

This was built on the point of a little peninsula that jutted out into the sea, an almost tiny bit of land that seemed to defy the eroding power of the ocean. The light was to the north of the town, and gave warning of shoal water and the Hogback Rocks, which were in the middle of the small bay.

Toward this lighthouse a little group of men were now carrying Harry Matthews. They were walking slowly, to make it as easy for him as might be.

"Perhaps we'd better be going," suggested Dr. Hammond.

"Yes," assented Newton, almost wearily.

"You are sure you can walk?" asked the physician.

"Oh, yes; surely."

"Then, Jess——"

Dr. Ralph paused. The girl stepped toward the rickety old carriage, and the doctor helped her in.

"You will be there almost as soon as we, if my horse moves as he usually does," the medical man called back to Newton.

The other waved his hand in answer, and trudged

on, alone, for the crowd had followed the men bearing the stretcher.

"Quite some excitement for Harbor Hill; eh, Jess?"

"Yes, I should say so! We heard the crash up to the lighthouse, Daddy Jed and I."

"How is his rheumatism?"

"Oh, about the same as ever. He takes your medicine religiously, but——"

She paused, and laughed lightly.

"You mean it isn't any good—Philistine, that you are!"

"Oh, I wouldn't say that for the world, Ralph! But probably Daddy Jed's rheumatism is very hard to cure."

"Most cases are. I can't even seem to drive it out of the bones of Aunt Aurelia, though I've tried everything. She will insist on getting up mornings to cook my breakfast, though I try to have her stay in bed and rest."

"That's because she lov—because she cares so much for you, Ralph," and Jess blushed a little at the word she had almost used.

If the doctor had heard it, he gave no sign.

"Yes, she *is* like a mother to me," he mused, as he flicked the horse idly with the whip. "I don't know what I'd do without her, unless——"

He paused suddenly.

"Unless what?" Jess prompted him.

"Oh, I—I was only thinking of something—something that might happen when I finish my book on nervous diseases, publish it, and—make a fortune!" and he laughed gayly.

"And then——"

"And then," he added more gravely. "I'll—well, you know what we all hope to do when our ships come in."

"Yes," and she spoke softly.

She looked back to see the figure of Ford Newton plodding over the sand. Beside him walked Captain Josiah Turnell, whose rheumatic joints hindered his progress along with the more rapidly moving throng.

"But my ship is a long time coming," added the physician. "Sometimes I am tempted not to wait for it, but to hazard it all now."

"Hazard what?"

If Jess had known what was on the lips of the young doctor, she would not have asked that question. But the answer, which was almost precipitated, was suddenly cut short, for the horse, with unusual energy, had shied at a bit of paper, and required all the physician's attention to quiet him.

A little later they were at the lighthouse, and the doctor hastened in to minister to Matthews, who

had, under the direction of Daddy Jed, been placed on a couch in the sitting-room.

"Is he all right, Doc?" asked several in the crowd, as the physician emerged half an hour later, having set the broken leg, and put it in splints.

"Oh, yes, he'll do very well now."

Dr. Hammond got into his carriage and drove slowly away. From the window of the lighthouse Jess waved her hand to him in friendly farewell. He had promised to look in that afternoon to see how both the men were doing, for Ford Newton was also at the little cottage which nestled under the light tower. He said he would stay until he learned whether his friend could be moved; which decision the physician promised to arrive at that afternoon.

"I—it's a hard thing to say—but I don't like that man's face," murmured the doctor. "That Matthews! He reminds me of a satyr—or of a devotee of the god Pan. I wish—— Oh, well, perhaps it will only be for a short time. He may be able to be moved to Portaby this afternoon. I hope so."

He looked back once more toward the lighthouse, which now held, besides Jess and her foster father, the two strangers. And, once more, Dr. Hammond shook his head. For when a man is in love with a girl, and hesitates, on account of lack of material prosperity, to ask her a certain momentous question, it is not exactly quieting to his nerves to know that

two rich, and good-looking men are in the same house with her. Especially when one of the afore-said men is likely to have to remain there for some time.

"I'll—I'll have him moved if it's at all possible," murmured the doctor, as again he flicked the horse with the whip.

Meanwhile Jess was ministering to the wounded Matthews. He was feeling much better now, and there was more color in his face. He sat up on the lounge, propped with pillows, and gazed about the little room. Newton was sprawling in a chair near him.

Idly, Newton picked up from the table something in a little frame. He gazed at it intently.

"What's that—her picture?" asked Matthews. "If it is, pass it over. She's the prettiest dame we've seen since we started out on this confounded tour of yours. Wish I'd never come, but it may not be so bad, after all. Pass it over!"

"It isn't a picture," answered Newton, as he handed his friend the little framed fragment of paper which Jess and her foster parent had been looking at when the auto crash startled them.

"Hum!" exclaimed Matthews, as he gazed at it. "Looks like part of some old love letter."

"Probably. Better give it back. She may come

in again any minute," for Jess had left the room a little while before.

"I say, Ford, do you, by any possible chance, think that this might be one of *her* love letters that she framed?"

"Hers? Whose?"

"This girl's; Jess, I think they called her."

"Oh, no. This is an old piece of paper. Been in here ten years, I should say. Girls of eight don't usually get love letters. She can't be more than eighteen."

"That's what I put her down at. Deucedly good looker; eh, what?"

"Yes; but you've got other things to think about now. You can't stay here. I'll get an auto ambulance and take you over to Portaby. The ride will be easy."

"Why can't I stay here?"

"Well, we can't put these people to all this trouble. A broken leg takes three weeks to heal."

"I won't be any trouble. Besides, I can pay for a trained nurse, if I need one, but I'd rather have that little damoselle—Jess. Did you touch her hand?"

"Yes. What of it?" and the other spoke sharply.

"Didn't it make you want to hold it, and——"

"Oh, drop that sort of talk!" broke in Newton,

with an air of impatience and anger. "After what happened in Boston, between you and Helen, I would think——"

"Now, now! Don't harp on that again. Lord, can't you think of something new to say? I did it all for the best."

"Yes, the best for yourself. How about Helen?"

"Oh, she—she doesn't care so much." He spoke with lazy tolerance. Newton wheeled on him.

"She doesn't care?" he repeated menacingly.

"Well, what if she does? I couldn't go on after—after——"

He paused, listening. There was a footstep outside the room, but it passed on.

"Look here," went on Newton, half savagely, "if you think——"

"That's just it, old chap. I don't want to think! Let me alone, will you? Isn't it enough to be mashed all to pieces in that infernal car of yours, without having you talk me into a fever afterward? Let me alone!" He snapped out the words, and the other's manner changed.

"All right," he said, after an effort to calm himself. "But about taking you away. I think I'll go out and see if there's a telephone in this ancient place. Then I can arrange for an auto ambulance, and also see about getting my car towed to some garage. They don't know what such an institution

is like down here. I asked one chap and he thought I meant a drug store. I'll go telephone."

"You needn't on my account," and Matthews looked calmly at the framed bit of paper.

"Why not? Aren't you——" Newton spoke sharply.

"I'm going to stay here! It suits me! It's a nice quiet sort of a place, just right for an invalid," with a short laugh, "and the little damsel seems to know something of how to take care of a sick man. You needn't telephone. I'm going to stay here!"

The door opened, and Jess came into the room. Her color heightened, as she saw what Matthews held in his hand, and she had heard his last words.

"Did you want anything?" she asked softly.

"Yes," murmured the man; and, under his breath, he added one word: "You!"

CHAPTER III

“IT’S JUST A—FLIRTATION”

“FORD, what’s the matter with that hoodoo car of yours, anyhow?”

“Matter with it? Say, Harry, it would be easier to tell you what isn’t the matter with it. The radiator is nothing but a sieve; the differential crumpled up like so much paper, and that’s what threw out the steering knuckle, so I ran into that stone wall! The forward cylinder is cracked, and——”

“Good heavens! That’s enough!”

“No, it isn’t. Both front wheels collapsed, and that’s why I couldn’t have it towed to some garage. It’s down at the local blacksmith’s now—regular ‘under the spreading chestnut tree’ sort of a place, you know.”

“Oh, I know. Everything is more or less ancient around here. But why there—at the blacksmith’s?”

“Because I’m in hopes he can fix some sort of a pair of front wheels on it, so that I can have it taken to the repair shop.”

Matthews and Newton sat in the sunny sitting-

room of the lighthouse cottage. It was several days after the accident, and both young men had recovered from the shock of their experience. Matthews had developed a slight fever, following the setting of his leg, and, much as Dr. Hammond desired to see him in any place but the little cottage, his professional viewpoint was that it would not be safe to move him. So he stayed, with Jess for a nurse, while Newton was accommodated with a room over Hank Stickleton's general store—a room shared with S. Rufus Blodgett, a general clerk and a would-be playwright.

The little village had not yet gotten over the excitement caused by the accident, and the quartering in its midst of two strangers from New York—wealthy strangers, if signs went for anything. Samantha Neal had set them both down as millionaires, and as for Captain Josiah Turnell, though he had revised his first opinion, that one of the men had been fishing the previous summer at Harbor Hill, he, too, declared that they were above the usual run of summer vacationists.

Matthews had made a faint show of disliking to remain at the cottage, to disturb Jess and Jed Blowden, but they had both declared that the broken leg, if nothing more, precluded any thought of transfer, and so Matthews had stayed, to his secret delight, and his friend's no little worryment.

They were talking together, while Jed was up in the lantern room, getting the beacon ready for the night duty, and Jess was in the kitchen, singing as she prepared supper.

"Did you ever hear anything like her voice?" asked Matthews, trying to look toward where Jess was.

"It's beautiful—she might do something on the stage, if properly trained. But why this interest, Harry?"

"Why? Man alive, have you ever seen a handsomer girl? I mean of her style. Look at her hair—blue-black—regular Egyptian color. And her eyes—the deepest violet! And her arms! Say, she happened to touch my cheek when she was putting that bandage on my head—and—I've been trying to work it loose again ever since."

"What, your head? You can't; it's loose already."

"No, the bandage, confound you! I wanted her to fix it again. But it's too tight, and I can't move, with this blasted leg!"

"Don't try. You might do some damage, and I hope it sets well enough to shift you at the end of the week, when I get the car in shape to transfer. That's the only reason I'm staying on—that, and for your sake."

"Oh, it is?"

"Of course. What did you think it was?"

"Nothing. But you needn't think of moving me. I'm going to stay. We had that out. I've arranged to board here."

"You have?"

"Yes, until I'm able to walk. The old man doesn't mind making an extra dollar. The light-house business isn't exactly in the bankers' class."

"Hum. Yes," musingly. "So you're going to stay? I thought you were anxious to get away from Boston? That's why I proposed the auto trip."

"Of course I wanted to get away from Boston. A chap isn't going to hang around a place where he's likely to meet, any minute, the girl he's just broken with. Certainly I wanted to leave Boston, and it was deucedly nice of you to offer to go touring with me. Though who'd ever suspect we'd land in this out-of-the-way place, where such a little beauty as Jess was hiding away, just waiting for some one to come along and make love to her."

Newton turned away with a gesture of impatience. He slowly walked over to the window, and stood gazing out at the calm sea. It seemed to soothe his perturbed spirits. Matthews was softly humming a little love song—a snatch from the latest opera—and, as Newton caught the air, he wheeled sharply, banged his fist against the window-jamb, and exclaimed:

"I don't see how you have the heart to do it!"

"Do what?" cried Matthews, much startled. "What's up, old chap? Lord, I thought you were taken with a fit. Do what?"

"Go on this way! I should think, after what happened to you—between you and Helen Byington, you wouldn't want to make love to any girl—at least not so soon," he added significantly.

"Why, what's wrong about it? Why shouldn't I amuse myself if I liked? It's all over between Helen and me, now. It's all for the best, as I said before."

"The best? Why, you practically deserted her—ran away from her!"

"Yes, but she—she released me."

"She did after you'd made it as plain as print that you wouldn't marry her."

"Of course I couldn't think of marrying her after—after what happened."

"No! And now no one else will want to marry her!" burst out Newton. "You've spoiled her life, if ever a girl's life was spoiled. Who'll have her now?"

"Oh, get out with your gloomy tragedy! Of course some one else will marry her, if only for her money!"

"You——" whatever Newton was going to say he thought better of it, controlling himself with an obvious effort.

"Easy!" cautioned Matthews, and there was a warning hint of steely hardness in his voice.

"But don't you see where you're going?" pleaded Newton. "Can't you understand where this will lead to?"

"No, and I don't want to. I'm satisfied to drift along just as I am."

"You mean you're going to fall in love with this innocent fisher-maiden, after breaking the heart and spoiling the life of Helen——"

"Look here!" burst out Matthews savagely. "I've stood about all I'm going to from you."

"Do you mean to threaten?" and Newton's eyes glinted dangerously, as he took a step toward the other.

"Threaten? No, of course not. But I don't like all this preaching, and I don't propose to be dictated to. I'm able to take care of myself."

"No one doubted that." This was nearer to a quarrel than the two had come in many years, for they were boon companions.

"Oh, Harry, drop it; why don't you?" pleaded Newton.

"Because I don't choose to. But say, old man, you needn't stay here on my account. Go ahead back to Boston or New York, if you like. I can make out. Send me a line now and then, but go ahead."

"No—I'll stay."

The girl entered the room, a little bed-chamber opening off the sitting-room, the only spare apartment in the house. It had been given up to the invalid.

"It's time for your fever medicine," Jess remarked, as she took a glass and a spoon down from the mantel. "Ralph would never forgive me if I missed giving it to you."

"Ralph?" questioned Matthews. "Oh, I see, Dr. Ralph!"

"Yes, he and I have known each other since we were children. I never think of calling him anything else but Ralph. He's the only doctor around here. He recently graduated, too. Oh, he *did* have such a struggle to get through college!" and Jess sighed, as if the weight of it had fallen on her own pretty shoulders.

"Stiff examinations, you mean?" questioned Matthews. "I know some of those examinations are fierce."

"No—money. Why, he used to work with the fishermen during vacation to get enough to pay his way. But he graduated with honor, and he's one of the best physicians on the coast. Dr. Peterson says so. And Ralph is working on a new system of treating nervous disorders, that will make him famous, some day, Dr. Peterson says."

"I hope it does," murmured Matthews. "Now, nurse, if you don't mind, I'll take my medicine."

"Oh, of course. I was almost forgetting. Here it is," and she stood over him while she measured it out. Matthews, meanwhile devouring her with his eyes, had placed his hand on the edge of the bed, where her own must touch it as she leaned over to administer the draught.

"Oh!" She gave a little cry of surprise. Matthews had clasped her fingers.

"I beg your pardon," he murmured.

Newton, who had been looking on, turned away, and muttered under his breath.

When Dr. Ralph Hammond saw his patient that night, he marveled at the improvement shown.

"You have no fever," he remarked, with professional pride, as he removed the clinical thermometer from Matthews's mouth, and twisted the slender glass until he could read the mercury column at ninety-eight and three-fifths. "The medicine was all right. You're normal—not a trace of fever."

"Not your kind of fever—but another," whispered Matthews to himself, as his eyes hungrily followed Jess about the room.

"He's doing well. He can be moved in a few days," said the physician to the girl a little later, as he was going out.

"Oh, Ralph, do you think it's necessary?"

"Necessary? Well, aren't you tired of waiting on him? Doesn't Daddy Jed think——"

"Oh, Ralph, I'm surprised at you! Tired of waiting on a poor man, who was all knocked to pieces in an auto accident! No, Daddy Jed isn't tired of him, and I'm not a bit fussy about waiting on him. He's not a bit of trouble! The other day he moved about the room a little on a crutch that Daddy made for him."

"Tiresome? Not a bit! He's been in all sorts of strange places, and wonderful countries, and he tells me all about them. It's very interesting."

"Yes, I dare say—but——"

"But what, Ralph?"

"Oh, nothing," and Dr. Hammond turned away, biting his lip. He had never been to wonderful places. Harbor Hill, and the medical school in Boston, had comprised his traveling.

"Shall I keep on with his fever medicine?"

Jess waited for an answer. It came with a snap.

"No!"

Dr. Hammond did not look around. Jess waited, as she stood in the doorway. Then, as she turned back, she murmured:

"He—he must be worrying about some case."

Dr. Ralph *was* worrying about some case, but it was a cardiac affection which no medicine known to the most skilled pharmacist could cure.

"Well, I'm off to the village, Harry," announced Newton, some time later, as he rose to leave the little cottage. "Anything I can get for you—cigars?"

"Heavens, no! Those last cheroots you brought must have been made from seaweed and cabbage! But what's the game?"

"I want to see that blacksmith, as I told you, and find out whether he can fix on two wheels, of some sort, so that I can have the car towed over to Portaby."

"All right. I'll try to be good until you come back. You'll look in on me before you turn in with S. Rufus Blodgett, won't you?"

"I guess so. Queer character, S. Rufus. Imagines he is the coming playwright. I had to listen to two acts and seven scenes of one of his dramas the other night."

"Heaven help us! What are we up against? I'm glad I have a broken leg, and violet-eyed Jess to——"

"Oh, cut it out! I'm going."

The store of Hank Stickleton contained almost everything from a crab net to a sewing-machine needle, but the trouble was that Hank could not always lay his hands on the article wanted. Consequently it was somewhat of a trial to shop at the "Emporium." But almost the entire male popula-

tion of Harbor Hill congregated there nights—not to buy, but to talk. There was a broad counter, whereon one might sit or lounge, and there were numerous barrels and boxes, useful for the same purpose.

It was in this store that Ford Newton, after vainly applying at the blacksmith's house for that artisan, found himself that evening; for the smith, together with the millwright and a score of other inhabitants of Harbor Hill, had gathered for their nightly confab.

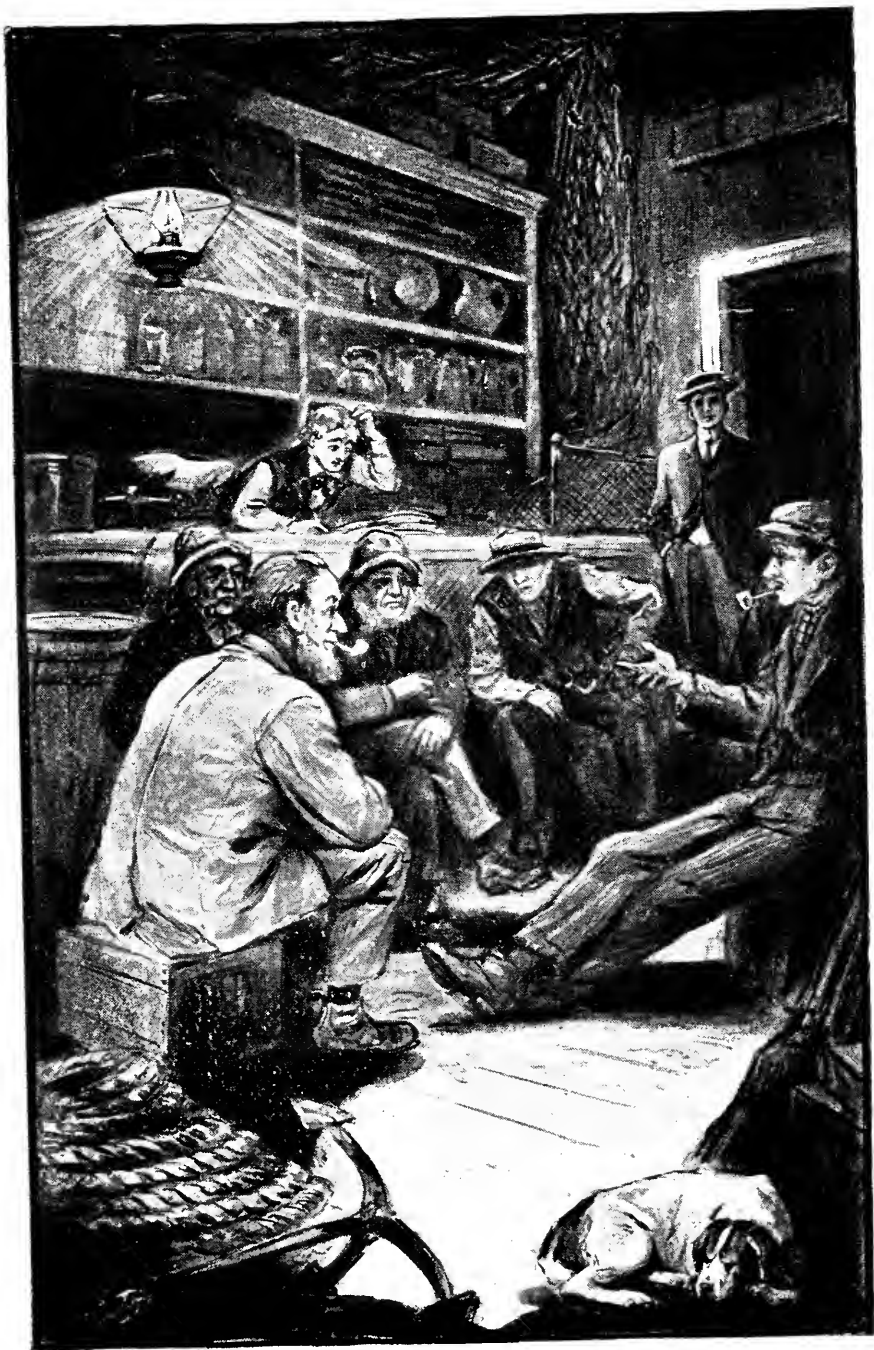
There was an embarrassed pause and a cessation of talk as Newton entered. Mr. Stickleton tried to cover it by noisily weighing out a pound of sugar, and Captain Josiah took a second extra large chew of tobacco, which made him almost choke.

"Is the blacksmith here—Mr. Tyredon?" asked Ford, conscious of a little feeling as if he had intruded on some family gathering.

"I'm here," answered Jack Tyredon for himself, rising from a nail keg.

"Oh, yes; I didn't see you. About that car of mine—do you think you'll be able to do anything with it?" and the autoist moved over to where the smith had resumed his seat, meanwhile thoughtfully whittling a stick into exceedingly fine slivers.

As the two talked, and Newton explained what he wanted, the others in the store tried to carry on



THERE WAS AN EMBARRASSED PAUSE AND A CESSA-
TION OF TALK AS NEWTON ENTERED.

a conversation. But it was more or less forced, and it was evident that all were listening to what Newton and the smith were saying.

"And how's your friend getting on?" asked Tyredon at length, when he and his customer had settled on what was to be done to the car.

"Oh, fairly well. He has a good nurse, in the person of Miss Blowden."

"You bet he has!" exclaimed Captain Turnell fervently. "There ain't a finer gal on th' coast, is there Simon?"

"S. Rufus, if you please."

"Bah! S. Rufus! Simon was your father's name, and Simon's yours! Any man that parts his name in the middle will steal sheep, in my opinion."

"Fortunately your opinion has no weight with me," spoke the clerk, as he did up a salt codfish for a boy with red hair. "Several of our great playwrights——"

"An' ma says them last eggs you sent her wasn't no good!" broke in the boy.

"They're the kind some of the audiences will want when S. Rufus puts on one of his plays!" cried Captain Josiah, with coarse, if applicable wit, as the clerk walked away.

"So your friend will be able to be about in a few days, eh?" asked Hank Stickleton, with a show of interest.

"Well, I don't know about that?" answered Newton cautiously.

"Dr. Ralph's medicine is powerful stuff," spoke Captain Josiah, who had hardly ceased laughing at his own joke. "I had some onct fer a sore finger, an', by gum! it was cured in no time. But speakin' of Jess Blowden, *there's* a gal!"

No one subscribed to that statement.

"I said *there* was a gal!" declaimed the captain once more.

"We heard you," replied Hank mildly. "An' we all know it. There ain't another like her on the coast!"

"She certainly has put my friend and myself very much in her debt," spoke Newton. "It was very kind of her and her father to take Mr. Matthews in, and——"

"Daddy Jed ain't her father!" exclaimed the captain.

"No?" and Newton looked surprised. The question had not come up between him and Matthews before, nor had he heard of the little romance of Harbor Hill. "Mr. Blowden not her father?"

"Not a bit of it," went on the captain. "It's a curious bit of a story. Like to hear it?"

"Certainly," and Ford Newton took a seat on a flour barrel.

"It was nineteen years ago this fall," began the old captain.

"Eighteen, you mean," interrupted Hank. "Eighteen year, Cap!"

"Nineteen! Don't contradict me! I know what I'm talkin' about! Th' baby was easy a year old when Jed picked her up off th' beach, an' that makes it nineteen. Jess is twenty year old——"

"She ain't, nuther! She ain't but nineteen, an' it's eighteen year ago! It was th' same year that Hi Michelson's barn burned! Guess I know, 'cause I lost a mowin' machine in that barn!"

"Well, all right, Hank, mebby it *were* eighteen year ago. Anyhow, Mr.—er—Mr. Newton—there, I knowed I'd remember your name—it *were* eighteen year ago this fall, when we had quite a storm on this beach. Couple of fishin' smacks went on th' rocks, an' had th' bottoms pounded out of 'em.

"But that ain't what I started t' tell you. It was on that night that Jess Blowden were found on the shore, washed up by the tide, an' clutchin' in her leetle fist——"

"Why don't you tell it from the beginnin'?" Hank wanted to know.

"I be!" declared Captain Josiah, "only I thought I'd put in an interestin' part right here."

"That's the rule in melodramas," spoke S. Rufus

Blodgett, and Hank glared at his clerk so malevolently that the budding playwright shrank behind a showcase.

"Anyhow," went on the captain, "Jed Blowden, the lighthouse keeper then, same as he is now, happened to be out on the beach, lookin' if he could sight any wrecks, when he seed suthin', washed up by a wave."

"Thought fust it were a big crab," explained Hank.

The captain glared at him.

"Yes, he *did* think fust it were a crab," he admitted, "but when he picked it up, he see it were a baby, in a sort of box, an' it were most drowned, but it had floated ashore, an' he took it to Aunt Aurelia's cottage—the same one where the doctor lives," he explained, "an' Aunt Aurelia brought th' young un around on catnip tea."

"And so Jess Blowden was washed up by the sea?" spoke Newton, who was much interested. "And did they find out from what wrecked vessel she came?"

"She didn't come from no wrecked vessel," declared the captain. "There wa'n't no wrecks here that night. But the next day, down the coast about ten mile, a woman's body was washed up by the waves, and some folks *did* say as how that woman

was th' baby's mother. But there wa'n't no way to prove it.

"Seein' as how Jed had took in th' baby, folks said he ought t' take care of th' woman's body. He done so, an' he had her buried upon th' hill back of th' lighthouse. Her grave's there yet, an' Jed put a little stone over it, with no name on, of course, for nobody knowed what her name was, an' she hadn't a thing on she could be identified by. Leastways if she had, I never heard tell of it."

"And that's the mystery of Jess Blowden?" asked Newton.

"Not all," spoke the captain. "When Aunt Aurelia were dosin' up th' leetle mite which the sea had cast up, she found, all crumpled up in one leetle pudgy fist, a scrap of paper. She took it out, an' saved it. That's all there were t' tell who th' baby was."

"I've seen the 'paper,'" spoke Newton, "but I never heard the story of how it came in the lighthouse. It's very interesting and unusual."

"We puzzled over that paper a good bit," put in Hank. "Me an' Daddy Jed did. You see, we all call him Daddy Jed, 'cause Jess did ever since she were a wee tot. Blowden had one daughter, Mollie, but she was drowned when a baby, an' he jest naturally took to Jess. Named her after his

wife that's dead. But that paper sure were a puzzle. Me an' Daddy Jed worked over it, night after night, after we dried it out. I allowed as how it was from India, an' so did he. We reckoned as how some woman comin' back from, or goin' to India, might have been on a ship with her baby, an' both fell overboard as she were readin' a letter. Though how th' baby ever lived through that storm, was more than we could fathom."

"Perhaps the box had something to do with it," suggested Newton.

"More'n likely, though how she come t' be in it, is a mystery, along with th' rest. Anyhow," resumed Hank, "we never found out anything about it, an' Daddy an' I never knowed enough about the Indian language to write there an' find if any people were missing."

"You never could, with what little information you had," commented S. Rufus Blodgett.

"Mebby not," conceded the captain thoughtfully. "Wa'al, a mystery it is, an' a mystery it remains—a mystery of the sea."

"Some day," spoke the clerk, who had theatrical tendencies, "I'm going to weave the story into a melodrama."

"If you do!" spluttered the captain, "if you do, I'll—I'll wring your neck—S. Rufus!"

"And the mystery remains," echoed Newton thoughtfully.

"It does; an' of late I can see it's botherin' Jess," went on the captain. "She'd like to know who she is. She'd like to know if th' poor woman buried up on th' hill is her mother or not. Poor thing likely fell off some steamer that went on, an' never knowed a thing about it. But, of late, Jess has been wor-ryin'; I can see that."

"Why should she?" asked Newton.

"Why—wa'al, bein' a stranger here, you don't know all that's goin' on. But for years we've been expectin' a weddin' announcement of Jess and Doc Hammond. Lately I've heard it whispered there's somethin' in th' way. Jess, it seems, don't want t' git married until she knows who she is, an' th' Doc—wa'al, he's expectin' t' get rich offen some new discovery he's workin' on. But, t' my mind, it's like patents. Nobody that does th' inventin' work gits anythin' out of 'em. Still, I ain't sayin' but what his new system of treatin' nerves is as valuable as some of S. Rufus's plays."

The talk became general in the store, gradually verging away from the romance of which Jess was the central figure. But Newton was interested, and, as opportunity offered, he asked Captain Josiah more about it.

The old seaman told how Jess had been cared for by the lighthouse keeper, who had adopted her in place of the daughter who had died. He related, though it was plain to be seen, how Jess had developed into a pretty girl, with all the village swains in love with her; how she had gently, but firmly, refused, one after another, including S. Rufus.

"An' then, for a time," went on the old mariner, "it seemed as if she an' Ralph Hammond would hit it off, but of late—wa'al, I don't know," and he shook his head. "Wimmin is queer creatures, anyhow," he concluded.

It was several days later when Newton found opportunity for extended conversation with Matthews again. The injured man had continued to improve, though his leg would be slow in healing.

"What about getting over to Portaby?" proposed Newton. "You're able to be moved now, and the car is in shape to be towed. Are you going to stay here until you can walk?"

Matthews, with rather a quizzical glance at his friend, announced that he intended to remain in Harbor Hill for some time longer, and, to Ford's objection that it was somewhat of an imposition on Mr. Blowden and his daughter to care for an invalid, Harry replied that he was paying his way, whereat Ford laughed cynically.

Nor did he cease when Harry frankly admitted

that the affair with Jess, which he began so lightly, was now affecting him seriously.

"You know, don't you, that she is a waif of the sea?" asked Ford. "Her's is an odd tale."

"I know it. She saw me looking at the scrap of paper she has framed. I asked her about it, and she told me. She wanted to know if I didn't think she might have come from Evansville, Indiana, from the evidence of the paper. I said it was as likely as anything. It seems she's trying to trace her parentage. I promised to help her."

"You have? Why?"

"Oh, just to pass the time, but, more principally because she comes and sits beside me while we look over the geography together, and put down all the cities that end with 'ville'. There's a raft of them."

"Of course."

"Yes; of course. And, every once in a while I have to point out one she has skipped, and her hand and mine—— Jove, Ford, she has a delicious hand!"

"You'd better cut it out, Harry."

"Why?"

"You might get in too seriously."

"I mean it seriously."

"I meant for her."

"So did I."

"Look here, old man, you can't possibly be seri-

ous. You—Harry Matthews—having a serious love affair with a lighthouse girl; pretty enough, I admit, charming and nice, and all that; but—to marry her—— You know your uncle would cut you off without a penny if you made an alliance like that.”

“Get out, you confounded anchorite! You’d only be too glad if I’d pull away and give you a chance!”

“Oh!” Newton turned aside with an impatient gesture.

“All right. But I’m getting on famously. The way she looks at me from those violet-blue eyes——”

“Harry, look here, you don’t mean to say you think seriously of marriage——”

“Marriage—who said anything about marriage?”

“But I thought——”

“Now, don’t get too serious, Ford, old man. Just because you love a girl you don’t have to marry her. This is only—only a flirtation,” and he laughed in a mirthless fashion, while Ford Newton looked at him with eyes that held suspicion, not unmixed with alarm.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE CLIFF

JESS looked up from the big geography that rested on her knees. There was a worried twist to her lips, three little furrows in her brow, and her eyes had a pathetic look in them, which, as Harry Matthews saw, as he sat near her in an easy chair, made her only the more enthralling.

"What's the matter, Miss Jess?" he asked. "Perhaps I can help you."

"You have helped me very much, Mr. Matthews. I was just wondering whether I had set down all the towns ending in 'ville'. I can't seem to find any more in this geography."

"No, it's too small. But I have another plan. I am wonderfully interested in this quest of yours—trying to discover your identity after all these years—and I've sent for a larger geography and also a postoffice guide. That will give us the names of all the towns and cities ending in 'ville'. Then we can make a list of them, and write, or, better still, send a circular, to the postmaster or chief of police, and possibly the city or village clerk, in each one."

"Oh, how good of you! I'm sure I never would have thought of all that. It's splendid, and I almost *know* we'll hear something. When will the books come?"

"I expect them with some things I'm having sent on from Boston. They ought to be here to-day, if the old stage doesn't break down. Enoch Berryman, the stage driver, promised to bring them over from Portaby."

"So you've sent for some of your things?"

"Yes; I'm going to stay on a while longer. I—I like it here, but don't be alarmed. I'm not going to put you and Daddy Jed to any more trouble——"

"Oh, I'm sure it hasn't been a bit of trouble; and with the way you have helped me—trouble? Daddy Jed likes to have you stay, I know. He enjoys hearing you talk, and he has some one to listen to his sea stories. He'll be glad to have you stay—a—a long time, I guess."

"And you?"

He tried to look into her eyes, but she was thoughtfully scanning the pages of the open book.

"Oh, of course, I—I can't thank you enough for the help you have given me."

"Then you're glad I'm going away?"

"Going away? When? Where?" There was a note, as if of alarm, in her voice.

"Oh, I've arranged to take a bachelor apartment

over the store. Stickleton has a nice room, and Ford says the meals are not half bad. I guess I can manage to stand the melodramatic ravings of S. Rufus for a time."

"And your friend—Mr. Newton?"

"Oh, he's going to come out here again, as soon as his car is in shape. He likes it in Harbor Hill, too. But you haven't answered my question. Are you glad I'm going?"

Once more he sought her eyes, but she avoided his glance—not so much intentionally, perhaps, as because she was still gazing in a puzzled fashion at the atlas on her knees.

"Of course I'm not glad you're going," she said slowly. "I—I hope you won't forget to come and see us. It's lonesome here, sometimes."

"Even when Dr. Ralph comes over to prescribe for Daddy's rheumatism?"

"Oh, Ralph—he has always come here; ever since he and I were children together."

"Childish sweethearts, I suppose?"

She laughed in a tantalizing fashion—laughed so lithsomely, and with her red lips parted to show her little, white, even teeth, so that Matthews, looking hungrily on, felt himself gripping the sides of the chair, to master his sudden wave of passionate desire to clasp her in his arms, and cover the lips with warm kisses.

"Oh, Ralph always said he was going to marry me," she declared frankly. "We used to sit on the beach together, holding hands, when the big waves broke, and we used to pretend that our ships were coming to us from some far-off land."

"And they never came?" he asked softly.

"They haven't yet, though Ralph has rather given up expecting *his* from abroad. He hopes to build one for himself, out of some wonderful new way he is working on, to cure nervous diseases. He is writing a book on it."

"Yes, so I heard. And so he asked you to marry him?"

"Oh, no! He never paid me that honor. He always took it for granted that I would be his wife, and so he dispensed with the formality of asking my consent." She was laughing once more, and as Matthews looked at the full, soft, warm roundness of her throat, he again gripped the arms of the chair.

"And he hasn't asked you since."

She looked up at him with quick suspicion, and the warm blood darkened the olive tan of her cheeks.

"I beg your pardon," he spoke quickly—sincerely. "I shouldn't have asked that. I didn't realize that we had gotten on such a serious subject."

"It *was* a bit serious—I mean the subject," she conceded. "But isn't it a lovely day? You ought to be out getting the air. Even Dr. Ralph admits that he hasn't any medicine better than the sea breezes of Harbor Hill."

"Yes, I was thinking of limping out. I'd like to get a good view of the ocean. There must be some point from where it can be seen to advantage, but I haven't been able to get around much since Ford's machine tried to climb that stone wall."

"There *is* a beautiful view," she said eagerly, anxious to praise Harbor Hill. "It can be had from the top of the cliff over there," and she waved her hand toward one back of the lighthouse. "There is an easy path up it, too. I often go there."

"Then I think I'll take it. I don't suppose, by any possible chance, I could induce you to go with me? I find I'm pretty much of an invalid yet," and he swayed a bit unsteadily as he arose. "I might faint up there, and need the services of a nurse," he added quizzically.

"I—I'll go with you," she said in a low voice. "I—I want to talk a little more about this plan of solving the mystery. You see," she went on eagerly, as she closed the book, and took from a nail a hat, of some soft, clinging stuff, "you see, Daddy Jed doesn't like me to think much about it. Of course,

he doesn't want to lose me. But I shouldn't go, even if I did find out who I was, and who my father might be—if he were alive."

"And your mother?"

"Oh, she—she is up there, I think," motioning to the little hill, and she spoke softly. "There always was a doubt about it, of course, but ever since I was old enough to know how I came to be found, and how, on the same night, the body of a woman was washed ashore, I have always thought of her as my mother. I attend to the grave, and sometimes—sometimes, when I get lonesome—I go up there and sit, and—and, somehow, it makes me feel better."

"Still, she might not be your mother."

"That is so. The whole uncertainty of it makes me want to know more. Daddy Jed is satisfied that the part of the letter I had in my baby fist came from India. I did, until lately. I told you I wrote to Evansville, Indiana, but they could give me no information there."

"Yes, you told me. Well, we'll see what a systematic campaign will bring forth. If we only had some name to go by—to inquire for. But the letters, 'ews' are very indefinite. There are so many names that might end in 'ews'."

He was looking at the framed scrap of paper.

"Your own, for instance," she said gravely.

"Yes—my own!" he exclaimed. "Jove! I never

thought of that before. But the Matthews are a pretty numerous family, and I never heard of any in my branch of it who were lost at sea. I'll make some inquiries, though. Jove! Wouldn't it be odd if you and I should turn out to be relatives?"

"Very odd," and she smiled up at him frankly. "But I must put this fragment away. Daddy Jed always gets fussy when I bring it out. He'd like the dead past to bury the dead. He has an idea that the mystery will never be solved—that he and Hank Stickleton, the storekeeper, solved all there was to it, when they decided that 'Ind' stood for India."

"Yes, Hank is rather 'sot' in his ways, as they say in Harbor Hill."

He limped slowly toward the door, across the threshold of which shone a broad golden band of the sun. Out on the sandy beach it was dazzling, and the warm May breezes brought with them the salty tang of the ocean. It was three weeks after the automobile accident, and Matthews could get about on a crutch.

Following the taking of the car over to Portaby, where it was being repaired in a garage, Ford Newton had gone on to Boston. Between him and Matthews there had been sharp words—almost a quarrel. The tour they had begun together in the car had been abruptly terminated.

Matthews had decided to stay in Harbor Hill, though it was possible to move him, and Ford, in challenging his friend's decision, had spoken some pretty plain truths. Matthews, with a sneering laugh, had admitted them—but he remained.

"If we're going up to the cliff, perhaps we'd better start," suggested Jess, after a pause. "Do you think you can stand the walk?"

"Oh, yes—with you," he declared, with such a look at the girl that she lowered her lashes, and again there came that dull tinge of color under her tanned cheeks. "This salt air gives one a tremendous amount of energy," he added. "I could almost walk to Portaby and see if my trunks have come."

"You had better not try it," she said laughingly, and more at her ease.

The soft hat Jess wore had fallen to her neck, being held in place by two linen strings, and the limp material formed a striking background for her blue-black hair. Matthews stole a look at her from time to time. On her part, the girl was gazing off across the sea—the lazy, sunlit sea, that had once cast her up on its shore.

"Am I going too slowly for you?" he asked. "Perhaps I can do a little better."

"Oh, no, you mustn't try. You might injure the bone of your leg, and then Dr. Hammond would say I was a poor nurse. No, there is no special

hurry. I must be back in time to get Daddy Jed's dinner. But the air is wonderfully clear now, and a haze may come up at any time. That is why I wanted you to see the view when it was good."

"It is fine of you, to bother with a poor stick like me. But I'll soon be able to get around again, as lively as ever. Only we mustn't keep Daddy Jed's dinner waiting." He had fallen into the habit of giving the lighthouse keeper that title. "It will be my last dinner with him," he added.

"Your last dinner?" There was a curious note in her voice that made the heart of Matthews beat strangely.

"Yes, I'm going to my new boarding-place to-night—when my things arrive. So it will be my last meal in the cottage of the lighthouse, unless—well, unless you take pity on my loneliness and ask me over once in a while."

"If it's lonesome, why do you stay in Harbor Hill?" she asked archly. "It's easy to get to New York or Boston from Portaby."

"I—I—er—I rather *like* the loneliness," he responded, with a swift glance at her. But she avoided his eyes.

"I expect I shall be selfish enough to come over pretty often," he went on, "for I'm going to get up a sort of printed circular that you can send to the different places we'll pick out of the postoffice

guide. So, you see, you're not to be rid of me so easily."

She did not answer for a few moments, but walked on at his side, silently. Then she spoke, and she seemed to have recovered her self-possession.

"Here is the path up the cliff," she said, indicating it. "Now you must walk up slowly."

Old Captain Josiah Turnell, who was on the strip beach, exposed by the low tide, digging for soft clams, saw the figures ascending the cliff path.

"Hum," murmured the old mariner, "there's that automobile feller. His leg must be purty nigh healed by now, ef he can walk up that hill. An' Jess is with him. Hum! By gum! Ef I was Ralph Hammond I'd think twice afore I let Jess go out with that chap. There's suthin' about his eyes, an' his sleek face, that I don't like. I wonder what holds Ralph back, anyhow? He ought t' 'a' married Jess long ago. Wa'al, th' ways of wimin is past findin' out, I reckon. I wish though——" but just then a particularly large clam shot a jet of salt water up into the old captain's eye, and his romantic thoughts were turned into another channel as he ejaculated: "Dum th' critter, anyhow! I'll mash his shell fer that!" and he dug vigorously.

"There," announced Jess some minutes later, as they topped the rise and stood on the top of the

cliff, that gave a view far out to sea, "isn't it beautiful?"

For a moment Matthews gazed out silently. As far as he could see beyond the lighthouse bay, stretched out the blue ocean. At the foot of the cliff the surf tumbled foamily and thunderingly, but high up as they were they could not hear it. Gulls wheeled and circled in the warm air. Now and then a fishhawk would swoop down, and suddenly circle upward, bearing in his claws a struggling prize. Far, far out was a ship, the white sails no larger than the wings of a gull.

"It's—it's magnificent," Matthews whispered rather than spoke. "It—it makes a man feel small."

"Small?"

"Yes—as if all he could do amounted to nothing! Oh, but it's good to be alive!" and he breathed deep of the salty tang in the breeze.

Jess sat down on a little grassy place. Awkwardly the man stretched his stiff leg out in front of him, and sat at her side. He was still gazing out over the ocean.

"Times like these I wish I could write poetry," he said. "But I have no talent in that direction. Ford does some scribbling."

"Does Mr. Newton write?" she asked.

"He claims to, but I guess it's like the plays of

S. Rufus Blodgett. I haven't seen any of Ford's stuff in print yet. It's only a fad. He doesn't need the money."

"He is rich then?"

"Very much so; but it hasn't spoiled him as it has me."

"Are you spoiled?"

"That's what Ford claims. I'm going to do something big—some day, though."

"Every man ought to do something, I suppose," she admitted, pulling idly at the grass.

"I think I'll apply for a position as keeper of the light on some coast like this, when my leg heals," he said laughingly. "The trouble though, is, that there are not many Harbor Hills."

"Then you like the place?"

"I'm going to. Jove! Look at that hawk! He has a fish almost as large as himself! The beggar! to spoil the sport in that fashion."

"Oh, there are many fish. I often go out in my boat during the weak and blue season."

"I must try some of that myself—if I stay long enough. But let's consider what we shall say in this circular we are going to send out. Tell me all the details of how Daddy Jed found you. I should like to take that paper out of the frame. There might be a water mark on it that would give us a clew."

Always ready to talk about her mysterious past, Jess eagerly related what little she knew. Matthews, although he had an ulterior motive in what he was doing, was genuinely interested.

They sat on the cliff for perhaps an hour. Then, as a haze began to creep over the ocean, and as the time drew near to the noon hour, Jess arose.

Matthews tried awkwardly to get up. A twinge of pain passed over his face as he twisted the injured leg. He was half way to his feet, but could manage it no farther.

"I'm afraid—would you mind?" he began hesitatingly.

Jess held out her hand.

"Oh, I ought to have thought, and offered before," she spoke contritely. "Don't be afraid; I'm strong."

The pressure of her soft, warm palm, the clasp of her fingers, thrilled Matthews. The girl pulled with eager strength, and the man came to his feet.

Somehow his crutch slipped, and he lurched forward. He would have fallen had not Jess quickly put out her other hand and clasped him by the arm. Thus the two stood almost in an embrace; and Jess felt the warm color coming into her face.

Just what caused Dr. Ralph Hammond to drive home from his round of professional calls that day, by way of the cliff road, he never knew. But he did

turn the patient old horse into that highway, and he reached the summit, just as Jess Blowden and Harry Matthews stood there, the girl steadying the man a moment until he could lean on his crutch.

"Thank you," he said, as he released her hand reluctantly, "I nearly fell."

"You are not so strong as you think," she said seriously. "Can you walk down?"

She took her hand from his arm. He could still feel the warm pressure of it through his coat. The color was still in her face.

"Oh, yes, I can walk, once I'm on my feet. Sitting still made me stiff. I'm all right."

They turned to go, and heard the sound of carriage wheels. Jess had just a glimpse of the face of Dr. Hammond. Then he had turned quickly away.

"Isn't that the doctor?" asked Matthews. "It looks like his rig." He had seen only a rear view.

"Yes," answered Jess in a low voice. "It is Dr. Ralph."

Somehow, though there was no occasion for it, she felt a vague uneasiness. Had Ralph seen her standing so close to Matthews?

CHAPTER V

DOCTOR HAMMOND PROPOSES

"DID I ever read to you any of my dramas?" asked S. Rufus Blodgett, of Matthews, that night, as the newcomer at the limited boarding-house of Hank Stickleton took his place at the supper-table.

"I don't believe you ever did," was the answer, and under his breath Matthews added, "I don't believe you ever will—if I see you first."

"I have just finished one," went on the clerk with the flowing locks. "It is partly based on a little romance right here in our midst."

"A romance here?"

"Yes, our own Jess Blowden."

"Oh, Would you mind passing the butter, Mr. Blodgett?"

"Not at all. You see, I saw the possibilities in the romantic story of Jess some time ago, but the inspiration did not come to me until recently. I have just finished the drama. I will read you parts of it after supper. There is one very strong scene, where Jess meets her lover."

"Oh, she's to have a lover?"

"I guess Jess Blowden could have all the lovers there is in Harbor Hill, if she wanted 'em," broke in Hank. "There ain't a chap here, of marriageable age, that hain't proposed to her, one time or another, includin' S. Rufus."

"And so none of the local swains seem to have taken the fancy of Miss Jess," resumed Matthews. He liked to hear all he could about the girl.

"Nobody," assented S. Rufus, "though one time it looked like Dr. Ralph had the inside track. But, somehow, lately, he hasn't been up to the lighthouse so often."

"I've noticed that," agreed Reuben Tittlemore, another of Hank's clerks. Reuben thought he could sing. "It reminds me of a song I know. It's written for a barytone, but I transpose it to tenor, and——"

"You needn't sing now," interrupted S. Rufus; "it's bad luck to sing at the table."

"I wasn't going to!" and Tittlemore glared at his fellow clerk indignantly. "And you needn't read me any more of them mushy-mushy drammers of yours, either, for I won't listen to 'em!"

"Don't worry. I'm going to have some competent criticism on them, now. I'll read you parts of my very latest work, Mr. Matthews, after the store closes. We shut up at ten o'clock, and I'll come right up. I'd like to get your opinion."

Matthews murmured something unintelligible, and went on eating. But he hurried out of the house after supper, and when he came back it was long after ten, and S. Rufus had gone to bed, sighing at the lost opportunity of having a real Bostonian listen to his effusions.

The postoffice guide and a large geography which Matthews had sent for, to enable Jess to get some clew to the mystery of her life, arrived a week later. There had been a delay in finding them on the part of Ford Newton, who had been requested by his friend to forward them to Harbor Hill.

"I think I'll take them over to her," said Matthews, one evening after supper. "It will give me a good excuse to call, and perhaps she'll walk out on the beach. There is a grand moon."

He strolled over to the lighthouse, walking slowly, for he had dispensed with the crutch now. His leg was gaining strength every day. There was no excuse for him to linger in Harbor Hill—yet he stayed.

"Jess? No, Jess ain't in," said Jed Blowden, as he answered Matthews's knock. "She went for a walk along th' beach a while ago. Said she'd be right back. Come in, an' sit down. I'd like t' talk t' ye, an' I will, as long as I kin. Have t' run up every now an' ag'in t' see t' th' light, though."

"No, thanks; I'll not come in, now. I have some

books for Miss Jess, and I'll just walk down the beach. Perhaps I'll meet her. If so, I can explain about them."

"All right. Can't lose your way, I reckon. Ye can view th' light as far as ye kin walk."

Matthews did not want the lighthouse keeper to see the books, for Jess had explained his objection to her attempts to solve the mystery. The old man felt that he would lose the sea waif, who was so much like a daughter to him.

Matthews, looking down the beach, on which the waves were lazily breaking, strained his eyes for the sight of the figure of Jess. Something black came into view, just beyond some jutting rocks.

"That's her," he murmured. "It's just the place for a—for a love scene for one of S. Rufus Blodgett's plays," he added. "What a fool that chap is!—and the other one's as bad, with his cracked tenor voice!"

Hurrying his footsteps, Matthews saw ahead of him another figure on the moonlit sands. It was the figure of a man.

"Dr. Hammond," he murmured. "I'm too late, if that's Jess, beyond there."

He still kept on, until he had made sure that it was the girl, and then, with rather a feeling of disappointment, he turned up the beach, and sat down on the sand, under the lee of a group of rocks.

Many and varied were the musings of Harry Matthews, as he rested on the beach. They began with the automobile accident, went on through the days when he had been in the lighthouse cottage, and took him on up to his present mood.

"I wonder if there's a chance," he murmured. "Sometimes I think I'm making an impression, and then, again—well, I know some girls with whom it wouldn't have taken over three weeks where Harry Matthews was concerned," and he looked at his rather shapely hands, which held the books he had brought for Jess.

"I think I'll begin a more vigorous campaign," he added. "Now that I can get around, I must see about a boat. I think I'll arrange for an auto, too. They're a great novelty here, and she'll go out with me, I'm sure. Queer that doctor chap doesn't come up to the scratch. If I had his chances——"

The musings were suddenly interrupted as Matthews heard the sound of voices. They seemed to come from the other side of the rocks that concealed him. He looked out, and, silhouetted on the sand in the moonlight, he saw two figures—those of Dr. Hammond and Jess Blowden.

"Jess," began the doctor, "I—I came over to-night to say something to you."

"Now, Ralph, I know you're going to scold me! Don't, please—it's such a lovely night."

"Scold you, Jess?"

There was a caress in his voice.

"I'd better be getting away from here," thought Matthews. "I can't be cad enough to stay and listen to another fellow propose, for it's evident that's what he's going to do. Yet, if I start to go away now, they'll see me."

He looked about for a way of escape. There seemed to be none. The moment he left the shadow of the rocks he would be exposed by the bright moon reflecting on the sand. He would be brought into bold relief, and his action might be misconstrued. Better to stay, even if he was an eavesdropper.

"Oh, I know you're going to say something unpleasant, Ralph, when you begin that way."

"Unpleasant, Jess? Of course not! Something important, perhaps, but not unpleasant, I hope."

"Oh, why even anything important, Ralph, on such a lovely night? Can't you just watch the ocean breaking into silver when the moon shines on it? Don't you remember, years ago, when we were children, and we wandered away one night, away beyond the village, and we couldn't find our way back? And we thought we were lost, until, after we got on top of the cliff, we looked down, and saw the ocean, with the moon on it, just as it is to-night? Then I knew we were safe, for the ocean, Ralph, seems to be a part of me?"

"Yes, I remember." He spoke in a low voice. "It was up on the cliff—we saw the ocean from there." He was silent a moment, thinking of another view he had recently had from that same cliff—a view that filled him with vague uneasiness and alarm.

"Jess," he went on, and his voice had a new quality. There was a deeper caressing touch in the tones. "Jess, we have been boy and girl together—playmates ever since either of us could talk or toddle. I used to say I was going to marry you. Do you remember?"

"Yes, Ralph, of course; but," with an uneasy laugh, "don't bring up too much of the past."

"The past was happy—the future may be more so. Jess, I was going to wait—wait until my ship came in, before I said what I am going to say now. I realize that I've got a hard struggle ahead of me, but I'm going to win! I feel it—I know it. I'm on the right track. It was a hard struggle to get through college—harder still to start the beginning of my practice. It's a struggle now! I—perhaps I haven't any right to ask any one to share that struggle with me."

"Ralph, I—I—why go on? I can guess——"

She tried to stem the torrent of his words, but he would not heed her. Eagerly he continued:

"Perhaps I haven't a right to," he said, "but of

late I have seen—I fear—oh, Jess, I don't need to tell you that I love you. I always have loved you—I always will! Ever since we plighted our troth as boy and girl, I've loved you! I've never thought of you as anything but my wife!

"I'm poor—I know it. I couldn't, for a time, anyhow, give you any better home than the one you have now; and I always said I'd never ask you to marry me until I could do better for you. But now—now I can't wait any longer! I—I love you! You know it! You—don't you—don't you care for me—won't you be my wife, Jess? Won't you redeem the promise we made each other when we were children? Some day I'll be rich—I'm not going to wait for the ship—I'm going to start out in a little rowboat—a dory, with just you and me in it, Jess. We'll start out—my book is almost done. When it's published it will make a name for me. Then we can leave Harbor Hill."

He took a step near to her. The unseen watcher behind the rocks could note the two black shadows close together now.

"Jess," whispered Ralph hoarsely, "I love you! Won't you say yes?"

There was a little struggle—a shifting on the sands. When the watcher looked again, the figures were separated by a patch of the moonlit beach.



"JESS," WHISPERED RALPH HOARSELY "I LOVE
YOU! WON'T YOU SAY YES?"



"Jess!" He was pleading, holding out his hands to her.

There was silence for a space.

"Ralph," she spoke softly, "I—I hoped you weren't going to say that—to-night."

"Why not to-night? I couldn't keep it back any longer!"

She was silent again.

"Because—because, I—I can't answer you—now."

"You mean you don't love me, Jess—there is some one else?"

"Silly boy! Of course there is no one else!"

"Then you do love me, Jess!"

He sprang toward her. She held him off with a gesture.

"You know I like you, Ralph—I always have—I always shall. I——"

"Then why——"

She held up her hand.

"I—I just can't answer you—now," she said.

"Is it—is it because of—because my ship hasn't come in? Are you afraid to trust yourself to me in the little boat?"

"No, Ralph. It isn't that. But you know the mystery that hangs over me—the mystery of the sea. I want to know who I am—to whom I belong

before—before I marry any one. I want to establish my identity.”

“I don’t care who you are—you’re Jess to me, and that’s enough.”

“But it’s not enough for me, Ralph. Suppose I should turn out to be——”

“The daughter of some rich man!” he burst out bitterly. “Then, I suppose, you would have no use for poor Dr. Hammond.”

“That is unjust of you,” she said simply. “I was going to say that if it turned out that—that I was of unknown parentage—that my father was a criminal—my mother——”

She hesitated.

“I don’t care!” he cried passionately. “I don’t care who your folks were! I want you! It’s you I love—not your family! It’s you I want, Jess!”

Once more he extended his arms toward her. She did not seem to see them.

“I thought you had given up hoping to discover the secret,” he said brokenly.

“I have never given up hope,” she replied. “I tried—Daddy Jed tried, and there seemed to be no way. So—for a time—I ceased my efforts. Of late there has sprung up a new hope in my heart. I have a plan——”

“Let me help you carry it out, then?” he begged

eagerly. "We will carry it out together—after we're married, Jess."

"Mr. Matthews is helping me," she said, simply. "He is getting me some books—we are to send out a circular——"

"We?" his voice was suspicious.

"It has to be done quietly, so Daddy Jed won't hear of it," Jess went on. "If you helped me, Ralph, he might suspect. So that's why I can't answer you to-night. I—I thank you for the honor—I appreciate what it means. I—I—oh, Ralph, I can't marry any one until this mystery of my identity is cleared up! When I come to my husband, I want the whole world to know who I am—I'm tired of being known as Jess of Harbor Hill—the foster daughter of the lighthouse keeper!"

"And perhaps tired of the lighthouse keeper, and the lighthouse, and of Harbor Hill?" he suggested bitterly.

"Ralph!" she exclaimed, almost as if he had struck her.

"Forgive me!" he pleaded. "I—I didn't mean that. Oh, Jess—if you only knew how—how much I love you!"

She did not answer.

"I don't care who you are!" he cried. "Won't you just come to me as you are—as Jess of Harbor

Hill—the little waif of the sea? That's all I ask."

Matthews, hiding behind the rocks, could see her shadowy head on the sands as she shook it to answer in the negative. Dr. Hammond was standing with outstretched hands.

"Won't you, Jess?" he pleaded.

"No," she said softly.

The doctor turned and walked slowly away from her over the sands. The girl stood regarding him a moment. Something like a sigh seemed to come from her. Then, she too, swung around, and made her way back to the lighthouse.

Like some misshapen gnome of the night, Matthews crouched in the shadow of the black rocks, and watched the girl as she walked away. Then, peering over the top of the rugged stone, he saw the physician striding along with bowed head.

"I think," whispered Matthews to himself, "that this little game of solving the mystery will give me the very chance I've been looking for," and he chuckled, as he still remained in the hiding of the shadows—like some evil spirit of the darkness—while all about was the wondrous beauty of the gleaming moon, shining down on the restless ocean.

CHAPTER VI

MISS DENMORE OF BOSTON

"RALPH! Ralph, dear!"

Aunt Aurelia Farnam knocked on the door of her nephew's office—a modest little office in a modest little cottage. The old lady glanced, almost with a frightened air, at the clock. The hands pointed past midnight. She had seldom known the physician to sit up so late, even when working over his book on nervous diseases, for he felt that he must keep himself in trim for his patients' welfare, and he generally retired early.

"Ralph! Ralph, dear! Aren't you going to bed?"

"Yes, aunt; I'm going to turn in right away. I—I was busy."

"Oh, that book, Ralph! I wish it was published! I've been sitting up, waiting for you to go to bed. I can't sleep until I know you're in bed. I couldn't imagine what kept you up so late. You didn't have many patients to-night."

She had opened the office door and looked in. At

the sound of the turning knob, Dr. Hammond hurriedly scattered some papers over his desk, and opened a couple of books. Had his aunt seen him a second before, she would have observed him staring moodily into the dark recesses of his office—for the physician felt in no trim for work that night—not even on his forthcoming book.

He seemed to see before him a slim figure of a girl—a girl into whose blue-black hair the moonbeams appeared to tangle, while they formed a halo around her laughing face—a face that had turned serious when he had spoken of his love.

“Always working,” went on Aunt Aurelia, with a gentle sigh. “Ralph, you’ll be an old man before you know it.” She was as solicitous about him as any mother. In fact, she had been a mother to him, for her sister, dying at Ralph’s birth, and his father not long surviving, the gentle aunt had brought up Ralph, and, out of her scanty savings, had sent him to school until he was old enough to work his way through college. “An old man, Ralph,” she went on with motherly solicitude, placing her withered hand on his head. “Why, I declare, you look older to-night—somehow!” she exclaimed.

“Oh, no!” he insisted, getting up from his chair. “I—I’ve had a hard day—that’s all.” And, how hard it was, she never guessed.

Dr. Ralph did not sleep well that night, and he

dreamed of many things, but the dream that had always dwelt with him a happy day-reverie, in which Jess was the central figure, seemed likely now, never to come to pass.

"As if I cared for her identity!" he muttered impatiently, as he tossed restlessly to and fro.

He was almost glad when there came a summons for him, at three o'clock in the morning, to hasten to the cottage of Gideon Flack, who, the messenger reported, "had been took all of a sudden."

The doctor drove back to his home through the fresh morning. His eyes smarted from lack of sleep, and his brain was heavy.

"Some of your hottest and strongest coffee, auntie," he called to her, as he left his valise in the office. "It will wake me up."

Dr. Hammond wondered when he would sleep again.

"Oh, Ralph, I've news for you," spoke his aunt, as she bustled about making the coffee. "You can't guess who's coming."

"Coming where?"

"Here! to pay me a little visit."

"Not Aunt Jerushy?" He referred to his aunt's older sister.

"No, indeed. Poor Jerushy is well-nigh bedridden. You'd never guess, so I'll tell you. It's Florence Denmore."

"Florence Denmore?" He stirred his coffee, and was but mildly interested in the news.

"Yes, you ought to remember her. She's your mother's second cousin's child. You remember Flo? She visited me once when you were about sixteen."

"Oh, yes, I remember her. She had red hair, didn't she—and freckles and a snub nose."

"Why, Ralph Hammond! Her hair was a beautiful auburn, and her nose isn't snub any more, and her freckles are all gone."

"Ah, some beauty doctor at work; eh?"

"Not a bit of it. Florence Denmore is too sensible for that. She has simply grown up to be a young lady, that's all. I saw her about a year ago, when I went down to Taunton, and she was as pretty as a picture. I asked her then to come and see us, and she promised. But I never s'posed she would. She'll arrive at Portaby on the afternoon train day after to-morrow, and I've arranged with Enoch Berryman to bring her and her trunk over on the stage."

"All right—I'll try to be nice to her, aunt. Oh, good gracious! Here comes Samantha Neal. I suppose she imagines she has something the matter with her. She'll take up ten dollars' worth of my time for a two-dollar fee, and ask more questions about all my other patients than a lawyer could

answer," and the doctor slipped into his office, as a nervous, thin little woman came up the front path.

It was two days after the interview between Jess and Dr. Ralph on the sands that moonlight night. She had not met him since, and she was rather glad of it, for there is a certain embarrassment in facing the man you have just refused, even if he is a playmate of years' standing.

"I know I'll blush when I do see him," mused Jess, "and he may think from that—— Oh, well, I just *can't* marry now. I must solve this mystery first."

True to his promise, Matthews had brought to Jess the postal guide, and a draft of a circular he proposed sending out. They had made a list of all the places ending in 'ville' in the State of Indiana, and the proper officials in these places would be first requested to give any information in their power, concerning any persons of their city or town, who had been lost at sea eighteen years before.

"If we don't hit the mark in Indiana, we'll try all the other States," said Matthews. "We'll take the summer to it. It is not going to be an easy matter, after all this time has elapsed."

"I realize that," spoke Jess; "and it's very kind of you to take this trouble for me."

"It's only a pleasure!" insisted Matthews, as he

handed her the copy of the circular. Shall we address the envelopes now?" he asked, as he looked at the list of towns.

"No; I had better do that by myself," she answered. "I don't want Daddy Jed to learn about this, until it's all over, and I have either proved my identity or made sure that it is to remain forever a mystery. So I'll write out the envelopes some night after supper in my own room. If you'll mail them for me, I will be very glad."

They strolled across the sands toward the Emporium. As before, Captain Josiah Turnell was digging clams, and saw them.

"By heck!" muttered the ancient mariner. "Ef Dr. Hammond don't look out, that city feller will have his gal! Jess ain't slow, even if she does live in Harbor Hill, one of the deadeest places on the coast—no, sir-ee! Dr. Ralph had better do some doctorin' in that line himself!"

Matthews did not go into Stickleton's store with Jess. Her entrance was the signal for the rapid advance of S. Rufus Blodgett and Reuben Tittlemore to the fronts of their respective counters. S. Rufus sometimes attended to the drygoods, while Reuben was in the grocery department, and then Hank would shift them about, for reasons of his own.

"Something in dress goods to-day, Jess?" asked

S. Rufus, as he ran his fingers through his long hair, to make it stand up in artistic confusion. "We have some new Liberty silks just in."

He was looking boldly at Jess, utterly unable to comprehend how she had ever managed to withstand his charms.

"I think I need a spool of number forty cotton, Simon," spoke Jess.

"S. Rufus, if you please, Jess," murmured the budding playwright. "S. Rufus, if you please. I wish I'd never been saddled with the name Simon! Think how it would look on a play-bill—Simon Rufus Blodgett."

"Howdy, Jess!" called Mr. Stickleton heartily. "Fine weather we're havin'. How's Daddy Jed?"

"Very well, except for the rheumatism."

"Yes, I 'spect so. Wa'al, Dr. Ralph will have t' stop around an' see him, though I don't s'pose he needs that sort of an excuse t' git around t' th' Harbor Hill light more than occasionally, eh, Jess?"

"Yes, Daddy Jed thinks a lot of Dr. Ralph," she assented, with a little laugh of embarrassment.

"And so does some other folks, I reckon, too," and Hank turned to wait on a little girl who wanted two salt mackerel, which fish he drew dripping up from a kit in the dark corner, meanwhile keeping open ears, and his eyes on his two clerks.

Jess walked slowly toward the lighthouse, and, in spite of herself, the words of the storekeeper seemed to echo in her ears.

"Other folks do like Ralph," mused Jess. "He is fine! I always cared for him—I wonder if I—yes, I do love him. But, I—I wonder if I love him enough?"

She fell to day-dreaming as she walked along.

"I didn't think he'd ask me so soon, and yet—yes, I have always hoped that he would—after the schoolboy proposals he used to make so regularly. Poor Ralph! I wish——"

She paused in her musings, hardly knowing into which channel to direct her thoughts.

"I almost wish I had said 'yes'," she went on, as her pace became slower and slower, in conformity with her thoughts. "I care for him—care very much, and I know he loves me—he didn't have to say it, though I'm glad he did. If he asks me again——"

She almost laughed aloud at the suggestion. Then over her face there came a sober look.

"Yet with this mystery hanging over me, have I a right to marry any one, when I might bring disgrace, or, at least, link some man—yes, Ralph, I may as well say it as think it—link him to some relatives of whom he would be ashamed? It might so happen. Oh, if I only knew! I wonder if Mr.

Matthews can help me discover anything? I hope he can—yet I am almost—afraid!”

She seemed to start back, as though, even in the bright sunshine there was some horrible shape hiding ready to spring out and claim her as its own. A shudder trembled through Jess.

“I’ll not think of it!” she told herself resolutely. “I’ll think of something else—something pleasant—of Ralph!”

Jess smiled, and there came a happier look into her eyes.

“I believe—after all—even though I have refused him—I think—if he asks me again, and I know he will—I think I’ll marry Ralph!”

The smile grew brighter, and Jess walked on with lighter step. There came into her mind the air of a lilting love song. She hummed it gayly.

“I’ll say ‘yes’ when he asks me again,” she mused on, “and it won’t be so very difficult to have him ask me, though I’ll make him promise to wait until the mystery is cleared up before—before we get—get married.”

She whispered the last shyly, and there was a little spot of red in either cheek.

“I will say ‘yes’ next time,” she whispered again.

She looked ahead through the haze of sunlight. Somehow it was brighter, now, and the air seemed full of singing. Jess saw a carriage approaching

from the direction of Portaby, and in an instant it flashed across her that it was the carriage of the doctor—of the man she had just made up her mind to marry. At first she had a wild idea of turning back, or at least of going home some roundabout way.

“No, why should I?” she asked herself, with a little toss of her head. “We are just as good friends as ever—we—we’re going to be better ones—soon, I hope. I’ll keep on, it won’t embarrass him any more than it will me.” She took a few steps forward, and almost halted.

“Why—why!” she murmured. “There’s some one in the carriage with him—a woman. I wonder if Aunt Aurelia went on his rounds with him this morning, though she never does.”

But, as the carriage came nearer, Jess saw that the woman in it was not Aunt Aurelia. It was altogether too stylish a figure for that of the physician’s relative.

“It’s a young lady,” murmured Jess. She caught sight of a face framed in a mass of wonderful auburn hair. A face, lighted up by two dancing eyes, surmounted by a nose with just a hint of a “snub” in it, but which made it all the more alluring, a face with a firm little chin, and two red lips which, just now, were parted in a laugh that showed perfect teeth.

"It was so kind of you to offer to bring me over, Dr. Hammond," the girl was saying. "I never could have stood the ride from Portaby in that poky stage on a hot day. And how is dear Aunt Aurelia?"

"Very well," Jess heard Dr. Ralph say. He had not yet caught sight of the girl, as she was walking under the shadow of some trees.

"And yourself, Dr. Hammond—or may I call you Dr. Ralph?"

"Every one does—you may. Besides, we are relatives," and he smiled down at the roguish face raised up to him. "I'm very well."

"Oh, isn't it lovely here—I'm sure I shall enjoy it! I feel better already! The salt air seems to be such a tonic! I don't believe I shall need to take the one the doctor ordered for me. Anyhow, I forgot it, and left it at home. If I need any, I presume you can give me one."

"If you care to trust yourself to my professional mercies," and he laughed joyously. Jess wondered how he could. She almost resented it.

"I certainly shall, Dr. Ralph!"

They were both laughing now—the tall, bluff, finely set-up physician, and the little creature, of almost spritely build, at his side. The horse was coming slowly on. Jess would rather have avoided the meeting, but she could not. Very shortly

she would have to step out into the sunlight, as the row of trees came to an end.

In another instant, Dr. Hammond had seen Jess. He paled a little under his tan, and then, straightening himself up, he smiled and bowed most cordially. He drew up the horse, swinging the animal around, to bring the carriage close to the curb. Jess saw that he was going to stop. She was conscious that the girl in the vehicle was eying her calmly—almost critically.

“How is Daddy Jed?” asked the physician, with no hint in his voice that he was speaking to the girl who had refused him two days ago.

“About as well as usual. Why haven’t you been over to see him?”

“I am coming, soon. Miss Denmore, this is Miss Jess Blowden—my playmate of years gone by. Miss Denmore is my third or fourth cousin, I can’t just figure it out, Jess. She has come from Boston to get some of the good air of Harbor Hill.”

Jess bowed. Miss Denmore of Boston bowed. Dr. Ralph was a trifle embarrassed.

“She’s coming to visit Aunt Aurelia,” he went on. “I happened to be at the Portaby station when her train came in, and——”

“And Dr. Ralph—Dr. Hammond,” Miss Denmore hastened to correct herself, “Dr. Hammond kindly offered to bring me over in his carriage, rath-

er than make me ride in the slow stage. Though how he ever knew me, to pick me out of the crowd of passengers, I can't imagine."

"Oh, I knew you well enough, from my aunt's description," said Dr. Ralph.

"How was that?"

"She said you were as pretty as a picture!"

Miss Denmore's lips parted in a laugh, and she flashed a look at Jess—almost a challenging look. The horse started off, of its own accord. Dr. Hammond did not pull the animal up.

"Tell Daddy Jed that I'll be over to see him—soon," called the physician.

"And may I come and see the lighthouse?" begged Miss Denmore, leaning out of the carriage. "I remember wondering how it looked inside, when I was once here, years ago. I was a little girl then."

"I shall be glad to show you through," spoke Jess, with a smile.

"Do; and please come over to see me. I shall be horribly lonesome until I meet a few of the people. Do come!"

She smiled an invitation.

"Thank you—perhaps I shall," answered Jess, and then, with a lifting of his hat, Dr. Ralph drove on. Jess could hear the winsome laugh of Miss Denmore of Boston, and the gruffer chuckle of the physician.

“He—he doesn’t seem to be breaking his heart,” reflected Jess, as she paused to look back at the departing carriage. “He seems happy with her, and I’m glad—no!” with a little stamp of her foot, and a pouting of the full, red lips, “I’m—I’m not glad of it!” and there was a sparkling light in her eyes that was seldom seen there—the look of a woman—just a bit jealous.

CHAPTER VII

NEWTON TAKES A HAND

"WHAT are you doing, Harry? Taking correspondence lessons in how to be a lighthouse keeper, or doing a mail agency business in opposition to Hank Stickleton?" asked Ford Newton, as he unexpectedly entered the room where his friend was poring over a desk littered with papers. "It's a new one on me—to see you working at something."

"I—er—that is—I didn't hear you knock!" exclaimed Matthews, as he hastily shoved the papers together in a heap, and, with an air of studied indifference, tossed some heavy books on top. But he was clearly taken by surprise.

"I didn't knock," cheerfully explained Newton, "though I beg your pardon if I'm *de trop*."

"Not in the least. I was just—well, there's no reason why you shouldn't know. It'll have to come out some time, anyhow."

"Oh, I'm not anxious for confidences," interrupted the other hastily. "But Mrs. Neal said you

were in here, reading, from which I judge that she has the habit of looking through the keyhole. She seems to have a corkscrew eye, and——”

“She has,” interrupted Matthews, with a wry face.

“How’d you come to shift over here, anyhow?” asked Newton, as he took a chair. “I went to Stickleton’s store, expecting to find you listening to the seventeenth act of one of S. Rufus’s melodramas, or enduring a ditty warbled by that cracked-note tenor, and Hank informed me that you’d moved. So I came on here—I remembered Mrs. Neal since our little auto smash—and, lo! and behold, I find you studying to become a captain of industry.”

“Nothing as bad as that. The fact is, as the weather got warmer, I couldn’t stand the combined atmosphere of salt mackerel and strong cheese, which came from Hank’s grocery up into my room. I believe there’s a ventilator there which sent all the odors into my apartment. Besides, S. Rufus was beginning to get on my nerves. I heard that Mrs. Neal took boarders occasionally, so I changed over here. Where are you staying?”

“Oh, I came down from Boston last night,” answered Ford. “By the way, have you heard from Helen?”

“No. Why should I?”

“Oh, I suppose no reason, if you can’t think of any. I heard she was worse—that’s all.”

"Worse?" There was vague alarm in Matthews's tone.

"Yes—bad case of nerves. She's going away, I hear."

"Oh—if it's only nerves——" The other spoke with an air of relief.

"But why all the industry, since you said you were going to tell me?" went on Ford, after a pause. "Are you going in for literature, and are these some of the rejected effusions?"

"No; to tell you the truth, I'm doing this in the interest of Miss Blowden—Jess. You have heard the story of the mystery over her identity, and, as I hinted to you before, I'm helping her to solve it. I've prepared a circular, and I'm mailing it to certain authorities in all the places in Indiana that end in 'ville'. I think she must have come—or at least her folks, or whoever had her on that ship—must have come from that State. At least I believe the clew starts from there."

"And why are you so interested?"

"Wouldn't you be? The girl wants to know who she is. Besides, she as good as said she never would get married until she could bring a perfect identity to her husband."

"Still, I don't see——"

Ford paused. Matthews did not answer. There was an awkward pause.

"I don't see why you should be so interested in it," went on Newton. "You don't expect to be the husband in the case, do you?"

"I might do worse!"

Ford was ready to laugh, but a look at his friend's face halted it. He looked sharply at his chum.

"And you think you can trace her identity in this way, and solve the mystery of the sea?"

"I hope so—Jess does also."

"Um! But suppose you find out—I mean, perhaps it would be better to let sleeping dogs lie, you know."

"Jess doesn't think so. She wants to know the truth."

"Even if it isn't a savory morsel?"

"Yes—but what's the use of supposing that?"

"Oh, no use, perhaps. It's quite like some of those infernally clever detective stories. Tell me more about it."

There was an unexpected eagerness about Ford Newton, as he turned to his friend, who had removed the books from the pile of circular letters. Newton's eyes shone with an unusual glow, and his air of nonchalance had fallen from him as a garment, though he tried to preserve an air of studied and polite interest, not to say bordering on boredom.

But Matthews did not notice this. Eagerly, he plunged into the subject, and told his plans. Several

circulars had already been sent out, and some answers received.

"But none of them favorable?" asked Ford.

"Not yet. Maybe none of them will be. It's a very slender clew to work from, but it gives me something to do; it has made Jess hopeful, and——"

"It gives you an excuse for being with her frequently," added Newton.

"Yes, and I'm glad of it. I——"

"Spare me!" and there was a gesture of mock dissent.

"Do you really hope for anything?" asked Newton, after Matthews had shown him a photographic reproduction of the bit of paper that was saved from the sea in the baby's hand.

"Oh, I don't know. Sometimes I do, and then again I don't. But I'm going to keep on. It gives me something to do and to think about in this out-of-the-way place."

"You don't have to stay here."

"I know it, but I want to. Now, here's the batch of letters I'm going to send out to-day. I could do better if Harbor Hill was more of a place, but I have to get the letters ready to send out each morning by the stage, and they're mailed in Portaby. I lose a day on each mail that way."

"I'll take them over with me this afternoon, when I go back," proposed Newton carelessly.

"Good! I wish you would. Then you're going back to-day?"

"Yes; I only ran down to see you. But I'll stay to have some of that clam chowder you wrote me about."

"That's good! I'll tell Mrs. Neal; that is, if she already doesn't know it, from having listened at the keyhole. That's the reason I spoke so guardedly about these circulars. Neither Jess nor I want it to get out yet. She doesn't want Daddy Jed to know it—just yet."

"I see."

"Don't let the old gossip in here while I'm gone looking for her," cautioned Matthews, as he left the room, walking with a slight limp—a souvenir of the auto smash.

"Why, will she beard me in this den?"

"She'll do anything to talk—worst gossip in the village. I have to act as if I was a witness being cross-questioned by the opposing attorney. She has most of my life history out of me by main force as it is! Talk about corkscrews! I'll be right back!"

While he was gone, Newton idly looked over the mass of papers. His hand was near a pile of the photographic reproductions of the fragment of paper. Still idly, as though unaware of what he was doing, his fingers closed on it. His hand went

to his pocket. When it came away, the fingers were empty, and began drumming idly on the table.

"Chowder will be ready soon," reported Matthews, limping back. "Now, I'll make a bundle of these inquiries, and you can mail them when you go back. I'm glad to see you. How are things in the hub? Been to New York? I'm almost longing for the Great White Way!"

"Better cut this and come back. We can resume our interrupted tour."

"No; I'm going to stay here until——" Matthews paused.

"Until what?" prompted his friend.

"Until something happens."

"Oh!" There was a world of understanding in the exclamation, and then the friends fell to discussing many things until interrupted by the call of Mrs. Neal, who announced lunch.

"You won't forget to mail the letters?" asked Matthews as, a little later, he stood beside Ford's car down in the village, where the machine had been left temporarily.

"No; I have them safe. By the way, where is your—ahem!—affinity? Does that go?"

"Perhaps," and Matthews laughed. "She's out rowing to-day, I believe. Gad, Ford! But she can handle a boat! I thought I was something with an

oar—used to be in my college days—but you should see her in her little dory—it's marvelous!"

The machine glided away, while Matthews was calling his farewells. Then, catching sight of Jess approaching, he turned to meet her, while the man in the car looked back.

"So that's why you're lingering, eh?" murmured Ford Newton, as he had a glimpse of the girl. "Well, she certainly is beautiful and attractive—but there's Helen. Ah, Harry, you ought to be——" but he did not finish.

"And so you're going to solve the mystery, eh?" he resumed. "Well, I think I'll take a hand in the game. It's a little too one-sided as it is."

CHAPTER VIII

HELEN ARRIVES

JESS stood in the door of the lighthouse, shading her eyes from the sun that glinted from the tumbling crests of the lazily-lolling waves. She breathed in deep of the salt-tanged air—the warm air of the early summer.

“Ho, Daddy Jed!” she called, in her full, rich tones, as she turned to look back into the cheerful room. “Ho, Daddy! Where are you?”

“Comin’, Jess! Comin’! This plagued rheumatism don’t seem t’ git any better for all th’ physic Dr. Ralph pours int’ me, same’s I fill the lantern with ile! Ouch! Wow!”

“Oh, I’m sure you will be better, Daddy, when the warm weather comes, and it will be here soon. You always are better in the summer. But do you take the medicine regularly?”

“Well, I guess I do, Jess!” with an indignant air. “I’ve got it down to a regular schedule. I takes it at high water an’ at low water—jest as reg’lar as th’ tides! That’s what I do!”

“Oh, Daddy, I’m sure Dr. Ralph never meant it

to be taken that way! It says three times a day on the bottle, and you can't go by the tides."

"Why not, I'd like to know? Ain't it high water twice a day, an' ain't it low water twice a day, jest th' same? That gits me in four doses 'stid of three. But it ain't no good. I'm goin' t' ask Doc fer some other kind. An', now I think of it, he ain't been here so much lately, eh, Jess?"

He looked at her quizzically, as he limped across the floor, having descended from the light tower.

"I hadn't noticed it."

Jess was busily engaged in pulling a loose thread from her dress. It was curious how obstinate that thread seemed.

"Wa'al, he ain't been here as often as common; I've noticed it," went on Jed, puffing as he eased himself into a comfortable chair. "I thought mebby—wa'al, ye know how it is, sometimes. I thought mebby you an' him——"

He paused suggestively, and seemed anxious.

"Oh, Daddy Jed! Ralph and I are just—just the same as ever!" The thread came away with a sudden jerk.

"That's good. Ye know, Jess, an old man has hopes an' dreams that young folks don't allers suspect. Hopes an' dreams—yep—hopes an' dreams," and he was whispering the words now, nodding gently in the warm sunlight.

"I'm going out for a row, Daddy," went on Jess, as she moved once more toward the open door. "It's glorious on the water, and I haven't been across the bay in some time."

"All right, Jess. Ye might try fer a few fish, ef ye feel like it. Some fresh ones would go mighty nice, now. Mebby th' weaks are runnin', though it's a mite early. An' so ye think there ain't nothin' in th' Doc not comin' so often?"

"Nothing, except that I suppose he is busier than usual. There is a deal of sickness in Harbor Hill now." Her voice was studiously cool.

"Um. Yes. I heard Hank Stickleton sayin' suthin' about Aunt Aurelia havin' visitors."

"Yes, I believe there is a young lady staying there—some sort of niece or cousin—I didn't hear exactly." Jess had made her voice very indifferent. "Well, I'm off, Daddy—I'll be back for dinner. Now, don't go polishing the lenses any more. There's time enough when I get here. I'll have all the afternoon, and you know climbing those stairs always makes your rheumatism worse."

"So it does, Jess! So it does! But don't let any of th' lighthouse inspectors hear you say that, or they might retire me. I'm good for a deal of work yit!" and he rocked slowly to and fro in the chair.

Jess strolled down to the beach, her lithe limbs swinging her along with a delightful stride.

"Oh, it's wonderful—wonderful—just to be alive!" she exulted, as she breathed deeply of the salt air, and walked over the sand to where her dory was drawn up beyond high-water mark. The tide was almost at flood, the waves in the little sheltered cove breaking lazily on the beach.

As Jess was about to push her boat into the water, having grasped the gunwale in her muscular brown hands, she was aware of a movement among a pile of lobster pots, piled high on the shingle. A towering heap of the lath-constructed affairs suddenly toppled and fell, revealing behind them the swaying, lurching figure of a bronzed man—a toiler of the sea. Jess gazed at him curiously—almost apprehensively.

"Gideon Flack," she murmured. "He—he's been drinking again, and he promised he wouldn't—promised me—promised his mother. Poor Gid!"

"'Lo, Jess!" leered the fisherman, with what he meant for a smile, but which was only a maudlin effort. "Goin' out? I'll help shove th' boat. I allers likes t' help th' women folks—'specially you, Jess!"

"Gideon!" Jess spoke with steely sharpness. All the gentle, caressing tone was gone from her voice.

"Eh?" Gideon straightened up, as does a sol-

dier at the call of "Attention!" Some of the stupidity seemed to fall away from him.

"Gideon!" She spoke again.

"Don't, Miss Jess—Jess! Don't look at me that way! I—I knows I've gone an' done it ag'in! But I was out—out late th' other night in th' rain—an'—an'——" His voice fell away weakly.

"But, Gideon, your promise!"

"I—er—I know it, Miss Jess. I won't do it ag'in! I'll help you put your boat in—goin' fer a row—yes, that's what you're goin' t' do! Goin' fer a row. Gideon Flack—he'll come with you. Gid can row. I'll take you out, an' we'll take up some pots! You like lobsters, Jess?"

He was gazing at her now, with tears in his eyes, as if the issue of a world depended on her answer.

"Go away, Gideon," she said more softly. "Go home; or, better still, go and lie down somewhere in the shade and sleep. Then go home, and—and, perhaps your mother won't know. It's—it's killing her, Gideon!"

"I know it. I ain't ever goin' t' touch another drop! Hones', I ain't! I'll go sleep—go sleep—but firs' I'll help you put boat in wa'er. I'm strong. 'Tain't no work for Jess Blowden. Your hands is too little. Let Gid do it!"

He lurched over the sands. Jess labored to get

her boat in before he reached her, but it slid along with difficulty. In another moment the fisherman was at her side.

"I'll do it! Let Gid do it!" he murmured, as his rough, gnarled hands closed on the gunwales. Accidentally he touched the brown fingers of Jess. As if an electric shock had thrilled him, he let go his hold of the boat, and clasped her warm palm. She threw herself back, and away from him, but he clung to her hand.

"Jess! Jess!" he whispered thickly. "I—I love you, Jess! How soft your hand is! Give me other one, Jess!"

"Let me go, Gideon, at once! You don't know what you are doing! You are not yourself! Let me go!"

He clung to her, swaying, and smiling foolishly up into her face. Holding one hand, he sought to pass his other arm about her waist.

"Mus' have one kiss—only one, from pretty Jess, t' pay for puttin' boat in wa'er," he muttered, bending closer to her crimsoned face. "One kiss, Jess, darlin'!"

"Gideon!"

The cutting sting in her voice stopped him for a moment. He seemed to sober up; then, as the contact of her warm hand, which she vainly tried to withdraw from his cruel grip, thrilled him, he bent

over toward her. She wanted to scream. She felt a nameless horror shoot through her whole body. It seemed as if some monster was folding her in his embrace.

"You—you beast!" she gasped.

The next instant there was a sound as if some one had struck a billet of wood against the side of the boat. Jess felt herself suddenly released—she swayed, had almost fallen, and then was caught in some one's arms. She had closed her eyes, but, opening them again, saw bending over her, as she half-reclined in some one's clasp, the face of Ford Newton.

Gideon Flack lay a senseless and inert mass on the sand at her feet.

"You—you!" she murmured.

"I am glad I came—in time," Newton murmured, as he helped her stand upright. "Was he——"

"Oh, poor, foolish Gideon! He—he was not himself. I'm so sorry!"

"So he will be, when he comes to," remarked Newton significantly, as he spurned the recumbent figure with his foot. "The sot!" he muttered.

Gently Jess freed herself from Ford Newton's hold.

"Are you sure you are all right?" he asked solicitously. "Can I get you anything? Are you able to walk?"

He still held her hand—unconsciously, perhaps—as he walked along at her side.

“Oh, yes, I’m all right now. He—he was merely forcing his—his attention upon me. He’ll ask my forgiveness to-morrow. Gideon is not harmful—only foolish.”

“But I—can’t I do something? Come up on the rocks and sit down. You look pale.”

“No; I—I’m all right. I was going for a row. I’ll start presently. The air is glorious.”

Slowly she withdrew her hand from his grasp. It had lingered longer than she had realized. Entirely too long—so thought Dr. Ralph Hammond, who, passing along a footpath which bordered the beach, had seen the ending of the little scene, but not the beginning. Gideon Flack lay where he had fallen, concealed from view by the dory of Jess. The doctor only saw the two figures—Newton and the girl—and they had been close together.

“Another one!” muttered the physician. “First it was Matthews, and now it’s Newton. No wonder she doesn’t want to say ‘yes’ to me. I’m beginning to understand. Oh, Jess!” and his voice that had been bitter, suddenly became tender. He stood looking down at the beach, with the waves breaking gently upon it, himself concealed from view by a tree. Newton was close beside the girl, talking earnestly to her.

"Hang it!" the doctor muttered savagely. "I ought not to have waited so long. The advent of those two autoists has turned her head. I've been wondering why Matthews lingered on, and now I know. And then Newton comes, though I thought he had gone for good. She's playing them both, and she's playing me for a fool! But she won't do it any longer! I'm done with her for good!"

Savagely swinging his surgical bag, Dr. Ralph trudged on, bitter thoughts in his heart.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Miss Jess?" again inquired Newton eagerly. "Do you think it is safe for you to go out alone, now?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly safe. But you might put my dory into the water for me, if you don't mind. I'm—I'm afraid I'm a bit nervous about—about going back where he lies, though poor Gideon never did such a thing before," and she glanced at the senseless figure in the shadow of the boat.

"I'll do it at once," spoke Newton gravely, "though I wish you wouldn't go out alone."

"Oh, I always do—I'm used to it. I'm going to try to get a few fish for Daddy's dinner. He's so fond of them."

Newton moved over toward the boat. He shoved it over the sands rather awkwardly. One hand seemed to have no strength in it. Jess noticed it.

"Your hand—what is the matter?" she asked.

"I—I—er—that is—nothing," he stammered.

"Yes, there is."

"Well, I fancy I struck that brute a little too hard."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!"

"For him or me?" and he laughed a little.

"For you both. Poor Gideon! Here, I'll help you with the boat."

He had moved it away from the drunken lobsterman, and Jess, grasping the bow, they soon had it at the edge of the little lapping waves.

Jess was afloat now, pulling with slow, strong and steady strokes out into the little cove where the sun danced on the water.

"Good-by!" she flung to Newton, across the dancing waves.

He waved his hand, turned, and, after a glance at the sodden Gideon, passed up and away from the beach. Jess rowed on, sending the dory ahead with a skill which Newton could not but admire.

"Jove! But she *is* a daughter of the sea!" he murmured. As Newton strolled on, Dr. Hammond saw him from afar. He saw Jess in her boat.

"After all, why should I care?" murmured the physician. "She—she isn't anything more to me—now. I'll forget her in—in my work. I'll win success—win success for—myself alone. My book will

soon be out. It will be a big hit, I know it will. I'll make a name for myself. I'll not think any more of her. She isn't—yes, she *is* worth it, but—not for me. Oh, God!"

He trudged on, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, knowing nothing but Jess. He heard her laughter—he saw her glorious presence——

"Oh, what's the use?" he asked himself. "Yes, I will forget her! I must work harder. I'll finish up my new book. I'll write out that lecture on nerves to-night. I'll sit up until morning to do it. I—I'll forget her—I'll forget——"

He paused irresolutely, shook his shoulders as though ridding himself of some burden, and then forged ahead. A moment later he turned to look at the place where he had seen her.

"I'll work—I'll forget—I'll—no! God help me. I *can't* forget!" And he rushed on, as though he was on the wings of the angel of life to stave off the call of death.

The fishing was indifferent, and Jess soon gave it up. She swung about, rowed across the cove nearly to the other shore, and then, noting by the sun, that noon was approaching, she swung back toward the lighthouse.

As she did so, she heard the "put-put" of a motor boat coming from Bayside, a little summer resort

on a point of land some miles distant. A few early visitors had arrived, and several owners of power craft made a living by taking out excursionists.

The motor boat soon overhauled the dory of Jess. She saw several men and women arranged along the side seats, and she nodded pleasantly to Al Bailey, the skipper of the *Foam*.

Suddenly, as Bailey swung his craft about to make the return trip, there was a little commotion aboard, and a woman screamed. Jess was alert in an instant.

"Perhaps some of their dresses caught in the fly-wheel," she murmured. This seemed to be confirmed a moment later, as the engine was stopped. Jess rowed over to the *Foam*.

"Anything wrong, Captain Bailey?" she asked, for he was an old friend of Daddy Jed's.

"One of the ladies has fainted—she is very ill, I believe," answered one of the other passengers.

"Move along on th' seats, you folks, an' let her lay down!" called Captain Bailey.

"No—no! I'll be all right presently," spoke a faint voice. "The smell—the odor of the gasoline made me ill. I'm—I'm afraid I can't stand it to go back in the boat."

"Can't run this craft 'ithout gasoline!" grunted Captain Bailey grimly. He was not used to having passengers faint.

"Perhaps she will come into my dory," suggested Jess quickly. "I will row her back."

"Oh, anything to get rid of the smell of gasoline!" gasped the sufferer. Jess looked at her. She was but a girl—about the age of the lighthouse lass, but wan and pale, and though she seemed once to have been beautiful, there was an anemic look about her face, a tired, nervous manner and a petulancy that had brought premature wrinkles. She sat up.

"Will you—do you really think you could row me back?" she asked eagerly. "I would be glad to pay any sum——"

Jess flushed and bit her lips.

"Oh, of course, it is very kind of you to offer," went on the other quickly, aware that she had made a mistake. "But I couldn't think of asking you to row me all the way to Bayside. If you could only land me—take me anywhere away from the smell of the gasoline—I could hire a carriage to go back in."

"Shall I come with you, Helen?" asked one of the other ladies.

"Oh, no, thank you, Maude. Don't spoil your trip for me. I'll be all right when I get some air unmingled with fumes of oil and gas."

"I can row you to the lighthouse—I live there," spoke Jess simply. "You can get a carriage in Harbor Hill."

"That will do nicely. I'll come with you, Miss—er—Miss——" She paused, questioningly.

"I'm Jess Blowden," was the quiet answer. "I'll put my boat alongside," which she did skillfully. The other moved along the seat, and was helped into the dory by Captain Bailey.

"I'll have t' sue ye, Jess, fer runnin' opposition t' me," he said, with a cheerful grin.

"All right," responded Jess with a laugh. She helped the young woman to a seat, noting as she did so, that she walked with a limp.

"Oh, have you hurt yourself?" asked Jess, with ready sympathy.

"No; I—I am lame from—from a nervous disease," and the low voice and reddening cheeks told that the affliction was recent.

"Are you sure you're all right, Helen?" asked the girl who had offered to accompany her. "It seems a shame to let you go off alone this way."

"Oh, it's delightful for me! I feel better already. I'll drive over directly I land."

Jess swung her dory away, and headed for the lighthouse. The tide was running out, and the pulling was not so easy, but her muscular brown arms were equal to it.

"Daddy Jed and I would be glad to have you stay to dinner with us," spoke Jess. "You can hardly arrange for a carriage before one o'clock."

People in Harbor Hill always eat at twelve, and it's nearly that now."

"Oh, I couldn't think of troubling you. Isn't there a hotel—a restaurant?"

Jess shook her head.

"We will be only too glad to have you. Daddy loves company. It's rather lonesome at the light. Do stay."

"Very well, I will; but you are heaping kindnesses upon me. And do you live in the light?"

"Since I was a little child, and Daddy Jed picked me up on the beach."

"On the beach? How romantic! Do tell me about it," and Jess did briefly, for she saw that her passenger was really interested. Jess ran the dory to a small float, as it was easier for the other girl to alight there, and soon the two were walking up the little pier to the cottage. Some distance ahead were two men. Jess wondered if they had been to see Daddy Jed, for she recognized them as Harry Matthews and Ford Newton, and they were walking toward the village on the shore road.

Matthews, who was talking earnestly to his companion, turned, with a sudden gesture, and waved his hand toward the ocean. As he did so, his face came fully into view.

Jess felt a shiver run through her companion, for the girl was leaning on the arm of the lighthouse

lass. There followed a little gasp, as if for breath, Jess looked at her sharply.

"You are ill—faint!" she exclaimed in alarm.

"No—no! It is nothing! It will pass over. But I thought I saw—that man——" she hesitated, and pointed to the two men.

"Oh, Mr. Matthews and Mr. Newton," said Jess.

"Yes, they came here in an automobile, and it smashed——"

She paused quickly, for her companion's face was ghastly.

"That—that man!" gasped the lame girl. "Is he—did you say Mr. Matthews?"

"Yes, Harry Matthews."

"Harry Matthews!" She tottered, and would have fallen had not Jess put her arm around her.

"Come into the house with me," said Jess gently.

"Did you know him—Mr. Matthews?"

"Yes," faintly. "Mr. Matthews—Harry—here! Oh, it is awful! I never dreamed of it!"

"Why? What about him?" asked Jess, directing her steps as quickly as possible toward the cottage, while she helped the girl along.

"He—he was the—the man I—I—was going to marry," was the whispered answer, and then, with a little gasp, she fainted into the arms of Jess.

CHAPTER IX

"JESS, ARE YE GOIN' AWAY?"

FOR an instant Jess had a wild idea of calling after Matthews and Newton, to get them to help her—she could not depend much on Daddy Jed. Then, as she realized what the girl had said about Matthews, she thought better of it.

"I think I can carry her into the house," she murmured, as she stood there, supporting the slight figure in her strong arms. "Then I'll give her—no, I'll send for Ralph. She must need some special treatment, when she faints so easily and so frequently."

In spite of the frailty of her burden, Jess found it quite a task to get the girl to the thick grass bordering the path. She managed it just as old Captain Josiah Turnell came along with his clamming hoe over his shoulder, and a basket on his arm. He spied the pair in an instant.

"Ho! What's goin' on now?" he demanded.

"She's fainted," explained Jess. "I wonder if you could carry her into the cottage for me, Captain? I must get the doctor."

"Sure, I could. Here, let me catch holt on her," he said, dropping hoe and basket. Rather clumsily, but with tenderness, he took the fair burden into his sturdy arms.

"Pshaw! There ain't nothin' to her," he whispered. "She don't weigh nigh as much as two bushel of soft clams. Now I'll carry her in, and lay her on th' sofa. But, pshaw! There ain't no manner of need of sendin' fer th' Doc. Jed an' me kin bring her 'round. I'll burn some feathers under her nose, or tickle her feet. That'll do it. I used t' do that t' my wife."

"No—no, you mustn't do anything!" objected Jess. "I'll make her comfortable, and then you can run for Dr. Hammond. It's about time he passed here on his way from his morning calls. Just carry her in, Captain Josiah."

"Who be she, anyhow?"

"I don't know, except that her first name is Helen," and Jess rapidly related the affair of the motor boat as she walked along beside the clammer.

"Fer th' love o' mustard, what's up now?" cried Jed Blowden, as, coming to the door of the house, he saw the queer procession advancing. Then, catching sight of the burden in the captain's arms, he added: "Is she—is she dead?"

"Only fainted, Daddy. My smelling salts—they're on my bureau," called Jess.

“She seems t’ be comin’ to,” observed the captain with a professional air, as he laid the girl on the lounge in the living room. “Mebby ye won’t need th’ Doc——”

“Please go for him!” interrupted Jess, and Captain Josiah went. Meanwhile Jess loosened the dress around the throat of the unconscious girl. There was a faint tinge of color in her cheeks, and her breath was beginning to be more noticeable, when the captain came hurrying back.

“Doc’s comin’,” he announced. “I saw him coastin’ past with all sails set, an’ I give him th’ distress signal. Here he is!”

Jess saw him coming up the walk with hurried strides. She looked beyond him, and saw the figures of Matthews and Newton merging into the distance.

“Is it Daddy Jed?” asked Ralph, as he entered. “Oh—a lady! Who is she, Jess?”

“Helen—that’s all I know.”

But the physician was not listening. He was a doctor now, and was feeling for the pulse with one hand, while, with the other he opened his medical case.

“Oh, where am I? How silly of me to faint again! I’m so sorry——”

“There now, you’re all right,” soothed the voice of Dr. Hammond. “Just lie quietly.” It was

several minutes after his ministrations had begun before the girl responded to treatment, but her recovery was rapid, and she was soon sitting up, smiling at the circle of anxious faces about her.

"Feel better?" asked Captain Josiah cheerfully.

"Much, oh, much better! The salt air is like a tonic."

"That's right," agreed the old seaman. "That an' clams is all that keeps me alive. 'Specially clams!"

"I'll be going now—if I can get a carriage to take me to Bayside," the girl went on after a bit. "I'm sure I've given you a lot of trouble, Miss Blowden."

"Oh, not at all—I'm afraid I'll have to call you Miss Helen——"

"Oh, how stupid of me! I should have told you. I am Helen Byington, of Boston. I came to Bayside on the advice of papa's doctor, who thought the salt air would do me good. Some friends induced me to go for the motor boat ride, but that odor of gasoline made me faint, and then——" She did not finish, but glanced at Jess.

"You must stay here until you are all better—must she not, Dr. Ralph?" and Jess smiled a signal for him to confirm her opinion.

"Certainly," he said gravely. "You must be quiet, Miss Byington."

She assented with a tired air, and soon Jess led her into the bedroom. Captain Josiah went out to resume his clamming, and Daddy Jed remained to talk to the physician.

"Daddy, your lighthouse is getting to be quite a famous place for emergency cases," said Ralph.

"That's what it is," agreed the keeper. "Them two automobile fellers, who got smashed up, was here a while ago, too."

"They were? What for?"

"I don't know. Jest called; friendly-like, I reckon. Jess were out."

"Oh!" There was a world of meaning in the exclamation.

Miss Byington continued to improve, but she consented to remain at the cottage for a while longer, and the physician, after mixing her some quieting medicine, and agreeing to telephone to her friends, took his leave.

"I'm ever so much better, dear Miss Blowden," said Miss Byington, later that afternoon. "I think I shall go back, if you can think of some way that I can get a carriage. I can't walk very well, since this nervous ailment affected me."

Jess wondered how long it had troubled her, and she also wondered what the situation had been between the frail girl and Harry Matthews. But beyond what Helen had said at first, the visitor did

not refer to it, and Jess, though she wanted very much to know, could not ask.

"I can have Captain Josiah get a carriage for you, though Harbor Hill doesn't boast of very much in that line," said Jess smiling. "The captain is down on the flats there, clamming. I can summon him with the horn," and she took a conch from the mantel.

"Oh, you are doing too much for me," protested Miss Byington. "Believe me, I am very grateful, but I am so ill I am not myself—I can't thank you properly now. Oh, I think I should like to stay here always!—a long time—if it was not for——" She stopped and glanced nervously from the window. Jess wondered if she was looking for a sight of Matthews.

"The air here is considered very healthful," said the lighthouse lass. "It might do you good if you could stay."

"I don't like Bayside," went on the invalid. "There is too much going on there. Oh, my riotous nerves! Why can't something be done for them?" Her pale and drawn face flushed, and she was really almost pretty, with some return of her former beauty, when her dull eyes were enlivened by a bit of emotion.

"Is it merely nerves?" asked Jess.

"Yes, that—and—that and, well, I had quite a

shock, and it left me—this way." She looked down at her lower limbs, that trembled weakly under her as she crossed the room.

"Dr. Ralph Hammond is a specialist on nerves," said Jess eagerly. "I'm sure he would be glad to treat you. That is—I'm not drumming up trade for him," she added hastily, "but——"

"Oh, I understand. I believe I would like to have his advice. He seems so calm and confident. It was like a soothing draught to hear him speak."

A vague uneasiness came over Jess. Yet, after all, a doctor must be that sort of a man—attending to women of various temperaments—appealing to them—if he is to be successful. Jess put a thought quickly away from her.

"Why don't you consult him?" she went on. "Look here," she was speaking eagerly now. "Why don't you remain here over night, and have him call in the morning? I'm sure you're not well enough to stand the drive, and perhaps Dr. Ralph—as we all call him here in Harbor Hill—perhaps he can recommend some treatment to you. It might even be good for you to remain somewhere in this neighborhood."

"I should be delighted; but I couldn't think of trespassing any further on your kindness. It would be too much——"

"Not at all! Do stay!" urged Jess, and, after

some talk, Helen Byington consented. She occupied Jess's room that night, though she protested that she be allowed to sleep in the smaller apartment to which the lighthouse lass betook herself, but Jess would not hear of it.

"I want you to have a good rest, so you will be able to show Dr. Ralph what a great improvement Harbor Hill air is over that of Bayside," Jess insisted laughingly, and Miss Byington gave in—she always seemed to be giving in—and Jess, who felt a strange and sudden liking for the frail girl, wondered why she melted so at the least opposition—bending her will to that of another.

"I haven't slept so well in weeks!" declared the invalid the next morning. "Really, I—I am beginning to be glad I'm alive again."

"Were you ever sorry?" asked Jess curiously.

"Yes; often, of late. Were you never that way?"

The silvery laugh of Jess was answer enough.

"Now, come out on the beach," Jess proposed after breakfast. "You can sit and watch the waves, and when Captain Josiah comes along to dig soft clams, you can talk to him. He is a quaint old character, and it is amusing to hear some of his views. Then I'm going to have Dr. Ralph stop here, and he can see you out there, and prescribe for you."

"That's kind of you. Oh, how lovely it is here!"

and she walked unsteadily to a window that afforded a view of the ocean.

When Captain Turnell arrived with his hoe and basket, he readily consented to take a message to the physician, and soon Dr. Ralph, driving past in his ancient rig, halted at the lighthouse.

"I have her down on the beach," said Jess. "I hope you approve of my line of treatment," with a mischievous laugh.

"Perfectly." Dr. Ralph laughed, too.

"Now you *must* cure her," insisted Jess, "for I have recommended you so highly that you simply *can't* fail. It's a chance to demonstrate your famous nerve theory."

"I'll do my best, but I hope you haven't given her too much hope. It looks like a very bad case to me."

"Oh, Ralph!"

"Sail, with rest, and some of our good air—well, we'll see what we can do."

He remained a long time talking to Miss Byington. Jess could see them from the window, as she went about doing the housework. Finally the two came up to the lighthouse together, Miss Byington walking with that curious halting gait, as though afraid to take the next step.

"Well?" asked Jess brightly, as they entered the cottage.

"I'm going to be thrown on your hands!" exclaimed Helen Byington. "At least, not exactly on yours, but I'm going to remain in Harbor Hill for treatment. Dr. Hammond is going to cure me."

"I hope so," the physician spoke gravely. "I shall try hard."

"To stay in Harbor Hill! How nice!" cried Jess. "I'm glad."

"I think I can persuade Mrs. Newcomb to receive her," went on the doctor. "She will be very comfortable there, and I can easily call. I'm going to put you through a severe course of treatment, Miss Byington. It is something new, and something different from anything I have ever tried, and, professionally, I am very glad of the chance. I can't guarantee a cure, but I am quite hopeful. Now, if there is any message you'd like to send, I'll attend to it. I will stop and see Mrs. Newcomb."

"I must have my things sent over, if I am to stay," said Miss Byington; "but I had better wait and see if I can be accommodated at Mrs. Newcomb's."

"Oh, well, if you don't stay there, I'll find some other place near here," went on the physician; "so I think I'll have your things sent over, anyhow. Then we'll be sure of keeping you; eh, Jess?"

"Of course. Oh, I just *know* you'll be better, Miss Byington!" and Jess clapped her hands in sheer de-

light at the prospect. Her liking for the frail girl was growing.

Mrs. Newcomb, a widow who had long nursed an invalid husband, readily agreed to receive Miss Byington, and two days later the girl was installed at her home. Jess went with her.

The Newcomb cottage was well out of Harbor Hill, on a breezy cliff, where an excellent view of the ocean and bay could be had.

“Oh, Jess—you don’t mind if I call you Jess—do you?” and Miss Byington smiled.

“Not in the least. Everyone calls me that.”

“Then you must call me Helen. But what I was going to say, Jess, was that I never can be thankful enough for having met you out in your boat that day. I was almost ready to leap overboard. I’m so glad I’m here. Papa is delighted, too. I wrote to him about it. Only, Jess, dear——”

She hesitated, and leaned over to whisper.

“Yes, Helen; what is it?”

“Will you promise me something?”

“What?”

“Promise never to tell Harry—Mr. Matthews—that I am here! He must never know it—never!”

Her face paled—the face that had been beautiful, but which was now pitifully drawn and wrinkled.

“Of course I shall never mention it, Helen, but he may see you, and——”

"He will never see me. I will walk only on a secluded part of the beach, and he is not likely to come here. Is he—he is quite friendly with you, isn't he?"

The voice was just a bit eager.

"He has been very good to me," said Jess calmly. "He is helping me solve the mystery—as I told you. It seems like a dream when I look back, and think how strangely he and Mr. Newton came here—and how my story interested him—Mr. Matthews, I mean."

Helen looked at Jess. It did not need the mystery, she reflected bitterly, to cause Harry Matthews to become interested in the girl who stood before her—a girl radiant with health and strength—a girl who seemed a part of the singing, laughing ocean. She looked at her nerve-twitching hands—she thought of her halting, uncertain, limping walk—and the tears came to her eyes.

"It *is* a mystery," she said softly. "I know how you must feel about it—how you must long for it to be solved, and yet——"

"I know—you think it might not be solved as I wish it to be?" asked Jess.

"Yes."

"Certainty is better than uncertainty," went on Jess in a low voice. "Every day I feel more and

more that I *must* know. Mr. Matthews said he hoped to have some further replies in a few days."

"I hope one of them is favorable, Jess dear. But mind, now, not a word to him, about me being here. Nor to Mr. Newton, either."

"Oh, you know him?"

"Yes, he is a friend of mine. But Harry—well, it was like a happy dream. Oh, I can't bear to think of it!" and she buried her face in her hands and wept softly.

"Don't! Don't!" begged Jess, placing her arms around the invalid. "Come out on the beach—the sea will calm you—it always does me."

They passed out, with their arms about each other's waists. And, as they walked along, with the tang of the salt air blowing in their faces, listening to the murmur of the waves, Jess wondered what there had been between Helen Byington and Harry Matthews—she wondered with a queer feeling that it might be something she ought not to know—and—was there mingled with it just a bit of jealousy? Who can tell.

"I wonder when Ralph will ask me—again?" mused Jess, as she was on her way home. She had seen but little of him lately.

But what few hurried times she had met him, showed her that there was a change in the physician.

Somehow he seemed older. His shoulders, that had been so broad and straight, were acquiring a stoop. And was that little tinge of light on his temples, the insidious march of the van of the army of time, ushered in by gray hairs?

Jess found Matthews waiting for her, as she reached the lighthouse, chatting meanwhile to Daddy Jed, who was delighted to have some one to listen to his sea stories. Matthews made a little sign to Jess—he wanted her to walk out on the beach with him, and he made a motion to some papers in his pocket. She understood, and nodded an acquiescence. Daddy Jed must be kept in the dark still for a while.

“There is no news yet—Jess,” spoke Matthews, as he took out a bundle of the returned circulars, and some letters. It was the first time he had used her name without the Miss. She did not resent it. Perhaps she was thinking of something else.

“Have you exhausted the possibilities?” she asked.

“Oh, by no means. I have sent out many circulars, and hardly a third have been heard from. There will be many more answers. But I came over to see if you would redeem a promise you made me.”

“A promise?” She looked vaguely alarmed.

"Yes; you said you would take me rowing—or fishing."

"Oh, yes; so I did. Well——"

"I don't know that I care for fishing, but I should like to have a row. I'll handle the oars, only I'm not much of an adept with a dory, and——"

"I'll take my sailing skiff!" she interrupted. "I was longing to be on the water to-day. Come! It is glorious weather!"

And presently the two were cutting across the bay before a stiff little breeze, which heeled the small craft over so that they had to sit on the upper rail.

"Isn't it fine?" cried Jess, as she tossed the wind-blown hair out of her sparkling eyes.

"Magnificent!" agreed Matthews, but he was looking at Jess, not at the waves, nor at the sun, nor at the scudding boat. For the young man, the sail was altogether too short.

In her room that evening Jess was looking over some of the replies received in answer to the circular letters. They were all of one tenor. In the towns the names of which ended in "ville" there was no record or trace, so far, of any such fatality as that mentioned.

"Well, perhaps I shall never know who I am," she mused wearily, as she laid the papers aside, "and

yet—yet I do so want to know—for more reasons than one.”

She sat silent, gazing at the documents, until suddenly roused by the call of Daddy Jed.

“Jess—Jess, where’s my specks?”

“Coming, Daddy. I think they’re on the mantel.”

“Oh, yes; I have them—queerest specks I ever see—allers gittin’ lost—I——” he had suddenly opened her door as he spoke, and saw the mass of papers on her table. Slowly he put on his glasses. Then he saw what the documents were—the photographic copies of the scrap of paper—the circular letters—he saw and understood in an instant.

For a moment he seemed to cringe back, as from some blow. He appeared to grow smaller, and his big frame was shrunken in his clothes. His face paled, and there was a wheezing in his breath.

Then he straightened up, like one who has received a nerve-racking shock, but who resolves to rally against it. He put out his hands, in protest—in appeal.

“Jess—Jess, gal, ye’re at it ag’in! Ye’re tryin’ t’ solve th’ mystery—th’ mystery of th’ sea! Eh, Jess?”

“Oh, Daddy, I—I didn’t want you to know! I tried to hide it from you! But—but—I—I feel that I must try and try until I do solve it. I can’t rest until I do. I want to know who I am!”

"I know—I know—Jess," brokenly, "I might have expected it. I ain't good enough fer ye, Jess. I'm only a rough old fisherman—a lighthouse keeper. It ain't enough fer ye t' feel that ye're Jess Blowden. No, I might have knowed it——"

"Oh, Daddy Jed!"

She sprang toward him, her arms went about his neck.

"There—there, Jess. It's all right. I—I s'pose ye *ought* t' know who ye be—but—but, ye ain't a-goin' t' leave me, be ye, Jess, gal? Ye're all I've got in th' whole world! Ye ain't goin' t' go off an' leave Daddy Jed all alone, be ye? Leave Daddy Jed, who took ye up in his arms when ye wa'n't but a leetle mite of a thing—a leetle mite of a thing—like a crab th' waves tossed up—ye ain't goin' t' leave me, be ye, Jess?"

His voice was broken. Jess felt his tears dropping on her round, full arms, as she clasped him. She felt his whole frame shake with his emotion.

"Oh, Daddy! Daddy Jed!" was all she could falter. "Oh, Daddy Jed! Daddy Jed!"

CHAPTER X

"YOU SHOULD MARRY SOME ONE ELSE."

GRADUALLY her sobs died away, and, becoming more calm, she remained standing with her arms still about him, her head, with its loosened masses of the glorious hair, resting on his shoulder. Over the face of the old lighthouse keeper there came a calmer look, though there was a nameless fear and dread in his troubled eyes.

"There, there, Jess," he spoke soothingly. "I—I know it's all for th' best—yet—yet I can't bear t' think of losin' ye arter all these years!"

"But why do you think you will lose me, Daddy?" She raised her tear-stained face to his.

"I kin see which way th' wind's a-settin'," he answered in a dull, hopeless tone. "Sooner or later it's bound t' come."

"Can you forgive me for trying, Daddy—for wanting to know who I am?"

He held her off at arms' length, and looked into her eyes.

"No, Jess, no; I—I—reckon not. I used t' think

th' sea would never give up its mysteries. I don't hardly think so yet—but I kin see which way th' wind's a-settin'. Maybe if th' thing was gone at systematic, same as it seems it *is* bein' done, mebbysuthin' will come of it. Yet I dunno. Th' sea ain't fond of givin' up its mysteries, an' when it does—when it does, Jess——"

He paused, as if frightened at the thought he had conjured up.

"Yes, Daddy Jed, when it does?"

"When it does, Jess," he caught his breath sharply, "sometimes when it does, Jess, there's only skeletons an' dead men's bones, an' all manner of unpleasantness."

"Daddy!"

She clung to him, as though then and there the sea had cast up on the beach some sodden corpse of the dead past.

"Daddy Jed!"

"There, there, Jess, gal! I didn't mean nothin'! Of course, I didn't! Only, wa'al—who's been helpin' ye in this work?" he asked quickly, motioning to the mass of papers.

"Mr. Mathews."

"Hum! I thought so. Almost I wish, Jess, not meanin' him any harm, of course, almost I wish he'd broke his neck in that there automobile smashup!"

"Daddy!"

"Wa'al, of course, I ain't only sayin' that kept in a manner of speakin' like, Jess. But I might a knowed how it'd be if some of them smart city chaps heard yer story Jess, an' tried t' help ye figger it out. Yes, I might a' knowed. So he's helpin ye? Have ye got anywhere with it yet, Jess?"

"No; I'm afraid it's hopeless."

"So am I. Almost I'm glad of it! Better not trouble th' sea fer what it hides, ye know."

"Oh, but Daddy, wouldn't you be glad if it turned out that I was—that I had rich relatives? Then I could take you to some nice place, where you wouldn't have to work so hard, and where you wouldn't have to climb the lantern tower stairs when your rheumatism hurt. Wouldn't it be lovely, if I was rich, and you and I could go off to some place together?"

"I don't want t' go away from Harbor Hill, Jess. Be as rich as ye like, Jess, gal, but I stay here."

"Then I'll stay with you, Daddy!" she said firmly.

He shook his head slowly, like one putting away from him something that he longed for, yet dared not take.

"No—no," he said, almost in a whisper, "it ain't t' be, Jess. I can't go away from here, but I kin see you goin'."

“Me going, Daddy Jed? How?”

“Oh, I kin see which way th’ wind’s a-settin’.”

“But, Daddy, the mystery may never be solved. I am beginning to lose hope.”

“ ’Tain’t that, so much, but you’ll be gittin married soon now, Jess.”

“Daddy!”

The rich, warm blood suffused her face.

“Married,” he went on doggedly. “I ain’t blind, Jess, though I have got th’ rheumatiz dreadful bad. If ye don’t go away from me on account of findin’ out who ye really be, ye’ll go when yer husband comes t’ take ye. That’s t’ be expected—it’s in th’ course of nature, though I’ve been tryin’ t’ fool myself, an’ make believe it never would happen. Yes, ye’ll have t’ leave me, Jess.”

“Never—never, Daddy!” and once more her arms went about his neck, and the two sat there, silent in the darkness, their thoughts busy with many hopes and fears.

The old stage swung along the road from Portaby, with the bony horses kicking up great clouds of dust, perhaps to hide their meager frames. On the seat, cracking the long whip, yet mercifully never letting it fall, was Enoch Berryman.

“G’lang!” he intoned. “Ef you was as hungry as I be, ye’d make twice as much dust! G’lang!”

The setting sun reddened the sea, and sent through the dust-clouds rays of rich orange hue. Through the mist Enoch peered, to see a figure trudging along the highway.

"Whoa!" called the driver. "Git up, Cap. I ain't got no load on t'-night. Git up. Where ye bin?"

"Clammin'! Where'd ye s'pose I'd been 'ith this hoe, an' my basket—pickin' daisies?" and the ancient mariner chuckled hoarsely.

"I thought mebby ye was off lookin' fer some of Kidd's treasure," responded the stageman, as he gave Captain Josiah a helping hand. "Didn't have much luck, did ye? G'lang, there, ye measley shads!" This last to the team, in virtue of their boniness.

"Nope; I didn't seem t' strike 'em t'-day. Gol hang it all! It's gittin' harder an' harder t' dig clams along shore, an' I can't handle a boat an' long-handled rake any more. I did have a fine lot of fat ones salted down in my old scow, but some skunks come along an' took 'em. Nice fat ones, they was, too."

"Who was fat, fellers who took 'em, or th' clams?"

"Th' clams, course. Wish I knowed who it was got 'em."

"Kinder hard t' guess, in a place where every

other pusson eats clams, an' them as don't, digs 'em."

"That's right. What's goin' on over t' Portaby?"

"Same as usual—nothin'."

"Nobody come in on th' train?"

"Yep—some folks."

"Nobody fer here?"

"Waal, that there automobile feller got off, but when I ast him if he were comin' over 'ith me, he walked off."

"Which automobile feller is that? There's two on 'em."

"This is th' one what owns th' machine. Th' one that weren't hurt so much. 'Tother ain't never gone away from here's, fer's I kin see."

"Nope; that's right. Wonder what he's hangin' 'round fer?" and Captain Josiah helped himself to a generous quantity of tobacco from the box which the stage driver hospitably held out to him.

"Say, mebbly ye'd better take th' box, an' give me back th' chaw," spoke Enoch, as he looked at the extra large helping which the clammer had appropriated for himself.

"Huh! This ain't much," and, to prove it, the captain stuffed it all into his mouth. Then, to close that part of the talk, he repeated his question.

"Guess it don't take no lawyer t' figger what he's stayin' on fer," declared Enoch.

"Ye mean it's Jess Blowden?"

"Sure."

"Kinder cuttin' Doc Hammond out, ain't he?"

"That's th' Doc's lookout. They do say as how he's been pretty sweet on Aunt Aurelia's niece, or whoever that purty gal is up at her house."

"Hum, shouldn't be s'prised. But here we be gossipin' t' beat Samanthy Neal. I wonder, though, why that Newton feller come t' Portaby in th' train, 'stid of in his machine, like he allers does?" and the captain looked at his companion.

"Can't say, less he don't want folks t' know he's here. He seemed kinder put out when I spotted him an' spoke t' him."

"Git out!"

"Fact!"

"What you s'pose he wants t' keep it a secret fer?"

"Hanged ef I know. G'lang there, ye swabs! Think I'm goin' t' be all night on th' road?" and the whip cracked viciously but harmlessly over the backs of the patient horses. They swung the ancient and rickety stage over the new inlet bridge—the same bridge which had been the scene of the automobile accident—and, as the vehicle rumbled over the planks, Captain Josiah, pointing with his short-handled clam-hoe, exclaimed:

"Speak of th' devil, an' ye'll hear th' switchin' of his tail."

"Meanin' what?" asked Enoch Berryman.

"There's that other automobile feller walkin' with Jess Blowden now."

"By gosh, so 'tis!" and the two gazed down on the golden sands, along which the lighthouse lass and Harry Matthews were walking.

"Wonder what they're talkin' over so seriously?" ventured the captain, turning to look at the pair.

"Better ask 'em," snapped Enoch, who, not being much given to talk, was rather put out at the amount of gossip that had passed between him and the captain on the short ride.

And then the clattering stage rumbled on, and was lost to sight in the amber-colored dust-cloud, while the figures of the man and the maid on the sand walked on, side by side.

Matthews had brought to Jess more of the hopeless replies received in answer to his circulars, and they had looked them over together, for, in one or two instances, there had been references to cases similar to that of Jess, and it was these which needed to be followed up.

The necessity for talking together over the matter of the quest, and the several calls he had made of late, had thrown Matthews very much in the

company of Jess. And he eagerly welcomed every opportunity to be near her. At first he would scarcely admit it to himself, but on that warm, hazy afternoon, with the soft sun glinting amid the curls of her hair, warming her olive-tinted cheeks, and as he watched her lips as they parted eagerly when she spoke of what the future might hold for her—on this afternoon Harry Matthews was more in love with Jess than ever.

It had begun on his part with an ordinary enough desire to be near her, to touch her hand—to say pleasant things and be listened to so deferentially. But gradually there had come into it for him more of passion—more of longing and desire to clasp her in his arms, and crush kisses on her warm lips.

Beginning with a determination merely to make a “conquest” of the “little fisher maiden,” it was resolving itself into a grand passion with him now. He felt that he must have her at any price.

And, day by day, as he saw her again and again, the desire of Matthews grew, until it had mastered and overwhelmed him, and, more than once he had resolved to put it all to the test. Yet he had hesitated, as some remark by Jess had shown him that, though she valued him as a friend, and was grateful to him, her feelings, for the present, ended there.

Of late, however, Matthews fancied that he saw

a difference in her moods. She was not at home as often as she had been, and, on his visits at the lighthouse, he had been told by Daddy Jed that Jess was calling on some one over on the cliff road.

The some one was Mrs. Newcomb, and Jess was visiting Helen Byington, but Harry Matthews did not know this, for Daddy Jed kept his counsel, Dr. Hammond, of course, said nothing, and Captain Josiah, the only other person who knew of Helen's presence in Harbor Hill, never thought to speak of it.

“And so, Jess, these are all the answers there are now,” Matthews was saying. “It isn't very encouraging, is it, Jess?”

She looked at him a moment before replying, and her eyes opened a trifle wider, while there was a warmer tint in her cheeks. It was seldom he called her Jess, but he had resolved to venture something now.

“You shouldn't call me that,” she said in a low voice.

“Why not?”

“It is only my old friends who do.”

“And am I not an old friend?”

“Not an old one, though truly you have been a friend to me—taking all this trouble on my account.”

“It has been no trouble, Jess.”

“Please don't.”

"I must!"

There was something in his tone that caused her to look at him quickly. There was a heightened color in his face, and his breath came more rapidly. He took a step nearer to her, and, before she was aware of his intention, he had clasped her hand.

"Jess—Jess!" he whispered warmly, "I must call you that. I——"

"No! No! Please don't!"

She tried to pull away, but he only drew her the closer to him, and the golden haze of the sunset seemed to wrap them in a mist, hiding them from the gaze of any chance comers.

"Jess! Jess, dear!"

"Mr. Matthews, please let me go! You are hurting me! What do you mean by this?"

She faced him indignantly.

"Mean by it? I mean that I love you, Jess! Do you hear me? I love you! I want you for my wife! I've loved you since I first saw you—since I first looked into your eyes. I love you, Jess! Do you hear me!"

"Oh, Mr. Matthews! Please don't! I must not listen to you!"

"Must not listen? Why?"

She freed herself from him with a sudden wrench of her lithe body.

"Why?" he repeated. Then he pleaded again.

"I love you, Jess! I love you! Don't you know it? Can't you see it? I want you for my wife! Won't you marry me?"

He held out his hands to her.

Jess faced him calmly, though the paleness of her cheeks that had been deep red before, and her labored breathing, told of the strain she was under.

"I—I can't marry you, Mr. Matthews, though I appreciate the honor you have done me," she said simply.

"Can't marry me? Why?"

"Because you should marry some one else," she answered, and there came to her the vision of the pale-faced girl in the cottage on the cliff.

"Marry some one else? I—I don't understand," he faltered.

"I—I am not the kind of a girl you want for a wife," she went on.

"But I—I want you!" he insisted. "I love you—I don't want to marry any one else—I don't love any one else!"

"Then you should," she said quietly, as she turned away.

Harry Matthews started back, as if some one had struck him a blow.

"I—I wonder if she knows?" he gasped in a whisper, and, with a growing stare, his eyes followed Jess, as she walked slowly away from him.

CHAPTER XI

THE DOCTOR'S ASSISTANTS

"WELL, what brings you down here again?" cried Harry Matthews one evening, as the "honk-honk" of an auto horn called him from Mrs. Neal's cottage, and revealed to him the figure of his friend seated in his big car. "You turn up at the most unexpected times!"

"Aren't you glad to see me, Harry?"

"Of course, yes. But why did you come?" and there was just the hint of a suspicion in the tone.

"Oh, merely took a run down to get some more of Mrs. Neal's delicious chowder. They can't beat it, even in Boston!"

"Yes, you did! I'll bet there's a petticoat in it somewhere!"

"Nonsense! I'm not like you, thank Heaven! imagining every pretty girl wants to flirt. But how about you? Listened to any more mushy dramas lately?"

"No; I've managed to steer clear of them. I think S. Rufus is waiting for you."

"Not if I see him first! How's the little fisher maiden?"

"Fine as ever. But come on, let's take a run down to the village, and listen to some of the old salts' talk. It's jolly fun. Besides, I'm tired of moping here by my lonesome. Glad you came along. Going back to-night?"

"To Portaby, anyhow. I can't seem to get used to docking in Harbor Hill."

"I wish I knew why you are running down so often," persisted Matthews. "Berryman, the stage driver, said he saw you get off the train at Portaby the other night, but you didn't show up here."

"Guess he was dreaming," spoke Newton quickly. "Here, have a cigar, while I crank up." He seemed anxious to turn the conversation, and, as he took his seat beside Matthews, he asked: "Where shall we go?"

"Oh, circle around a bit, fill up on salt air, and then go down to Hank's store."

They found a goodly crowd in "Hank Stickleton's Universal Emporium," as the sign had it.

S. Rufus Blodgett brightened up wonderfully at the entrance of Matthews and Newton. It was also observed that Reuben Tittlemore had ruffled his bushy hair, thrown out his chest, and was softly humming an opera air.

"I have written a whole new final act to my latest

melodrama, Mr. Newton," began S. Rufus, sliding up to the two newcomers. "I have substituted an airship for the automobile, and just as the villain is going to take the heroine off—— Yes, ma'am, them clothespins are ten cents a package," and S. Rufus interrupted his narration to answer the question of a woman in a calico dress who had come to trade at the "Emporium."

"As I was saying, Mr. Newton," resumed the clerk, when he saw that the customer did not want to buy any of the pins, "just as the villain puts his hands on the girl, and says, 'Ha! Now I have you! Give me those papers!' the hero in an airship—— What's that, Mrs. Roller? Yes, we have some fresh yeast cakes in—I'll give you one in a moment. You see, Mr. Newton, the hero comes in the airship, and he just grabs up the villain, and—— No, Jake, the chewing tobacco isn't on this side. Reuben will wait on you," and S. Rufus glared at the tall, lanky man, who had interrupted his talk.

He resumed:

"As soon as the hero has hold of the villain, he sends the airship up again, and—— Oh, here's the yeast cake, Mrs. Roller. Yes, it's two cents—no, they never was any cheaper. The airship goes up over a big lake, and we're going to have real water in the lake, and then the hero drops the villain

from the airship when it's over the lake, and—— What's that—you want three pounds of dark-brown sugar, Susie Peterkins? Well, in just a moment, Susie. The villain, Mr. Newton, falls in the lake, and then the hero in the airship turns around and sails back, and—— Yes, Susie, I'm going to get the sugar at once. What's that, Miss Dean? Yes, we have some kippered herring, I believe, if you will just wait a moment. The hero, you see, Mr. Newton, then catches up the heroine, and—— Oh, of course I'll wait on you, Mrs. Neal. Yes, we have some nice butter in," and, with a despairing gesture, S. Rufus hurried to serve a row of customers, while Hank glared darkly at his clerk.

"By jinks! I'll dock him ef he don't stop gassin' about that fool play of his," he muttered.

"Docking would do no good," remarked Matthews, with a sigh.

"No? What would then?" asked Hank eagerly, as S. Rufus handed out sugar, butter and kippered herring.

"Beheading is the only remedy," said Newton gloomily, and he took a seat between Captain Josiah and Enoch Berryman, where the melodramatic clerk could not get at him.

From the other side of the store came the hummed strains of a song, until Hank, losing all patience,

hurled a lead weight over toward the clerk, so that it fell on the counter beside him with a mighty thud.

"What—what's that for?" gasped Reuben, much startled.

"It ain't for no *encore*; if that's what you mean!" said Hank sternly. "Now you 'tend t' business, an' straighten out that thread case! It looks like it had been sent for sudden an' couldn't go. We've had enough of meller drammers an' operays fer one night!"

Matthews and Newton chuckled, the incensed clerks made sotto-voce remarks of a more or less derogatory nature concerning Hank, and the loungers in the store droned on in their talk.

As the hour grew later, they left, one by one, until a fear that lack of business would enable S. Rufus to take advantage of the lull, and inflict more of his latest play upon them, caused Matthews and Newton to take their departure.

"Want to take a little spin before you turn in?" asked Newton, as he cranked up his car.

"No, thanks, I'm going to get to bed. I'm tired."

"Don't even want to take a run down to the lighthouse, and see Jess?"

"No."

"By the way, how are you coming on with her?"

"Not at all."

"Eh?"

"I said not at all."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you may as well know, since you think you understand so much about it. I asked her to marry me the other evening, and she——"

"Jumped at the chance. Well, you *are* a fool!"

"She refused me!"

"She what?"

"Refused me."

"Did she say why?"

"Only said she wasn't the kind of a girl who would suit me, and intimated that I ought to marry some one else."

"Some one else? I wonder if she has heard?"

"That's what I wondered. But it isn't possible. Helen is far enough from her. Besides, how could Jess ever hear?"

"Of course she couldn't. Well, she told the truth, anyhow."

"Eh?"

"I say she told the truth. You *ought* to marry some one else—and that some one is Helen Byington. You know it."

"Oh, don't begin on that! I couldn't marry her after—after what happened."

"No, you took the best part of her life, and led her to expect that you would marry her, and then

you threw her over, and at a time when no one else in her class will take her up."

"Well, I couldn't help it. I couldn't be tied down to her. She as good as released me."

"Oh, well, as you say, what's the use of talking of it. And so Jess refused you?"

"Yes, and I was pretty badly cut up about it for a while. I didn't see her for several days, and then, when some more of the answers came, I made a break and went over."

"How did she receive you?"

"The same as before. Jove! I'm more in love with her than ever!"

And, as Newton chugged away in the darkness, Matthews muttered to himself:

"I wish I knew what brings him here so often." But he could think of no good reason, and, shaking his head over the puzzle, he entered the house.

As for Newton, looking back for a brief glance at where he had left his friend, he murmured:

"He'll ask her again, and she may say yes. I wish I could hurry those papers. They ought to be here in a day or so. Guess I'll stay on for a while. I'll pretend I want to buy a boat, though Harry is getting suspicious."

Several times within the next few days Jess paid long visits to the Newcomb cottage, where Helen Byington was staying. There was some improve-

ment in the invalid, under the course of treatment adopted by Dr. Hammond, but it was not entirely satisfactory.

"There is something on her mind," he told Jess, as they talked it over together one day. "I wish I could find out what it is."

"Perhaps I can," offered Jess, who already had an inkling of what it was.

"I wish you would. If we could get at it, and remove the brain disturbance, I know her nerves would respond."

"And would her lameness disappear?" asked Jess eagerly.

"I think so—I'm almost sure of it."

"I'll see what I can do," promised Jess.

"I wish I had such an energetic assistant on all my cases," spoke Dr. Ralph warmly, as he looked at Jess. She turned her eyes away. Perhaps she thought he would say something more. They were walking in the secluded, old-fashioned garden of Mrs. Newcomb, shut off from the road by a high hedge.

"I am very much interested in Helen's case," went on Jess. "I do hope you can cure her."

"If I do, it will be because of your help," declared the physician. "Well, I must be off," and he sighed rather wistfully. "I'm pretty busy these days."

Jess looked at him. There was a stoop to his broad shoulders that she had not noticed before, and his eyes had a tired look. She did not know that he was trying to forget himself in work. She felt an impulse to stand by his side, to put her arms about his neck and smooth out the wrinkles in his forehead. She wished—but what she wished she scarcely dared whisper, even to herself. He looked at her quizzically.

"How is the quest coming on?" he asked kindly, almost eagerly, Jess thought.

"Not very well," she answered, in rather a dull tone.

"Have you set a time limit on it?"

"A time limit? How?"

"I mean a time to give it up, if you can't solve it?"

"I don't believe I shall ever give up. I shall always try to discover who I am."

The doctor sighed again. Jess felt a little trembling of her lips. At that moment there sounded footsteps on the box-lined gravel walk. The girl and man, who had been standing close together, moved slightly apart.

"Are you there, Dr. Ralph?" asked a voice.

"Yes. Oh, it's you—Florence—Miss Denmore!" he added in some confusion, as he caught sight of his aunt's pretty relative. She stood there, regarding

the two somewhat helplessly—as though she had blundered into a confidential chat.

“I came after you—they said you were up here!” she went on breathlessly. “Oh, I had *such* a time, driving your horse, but I’m glad I have found you.”

“Why—what’s the matter?” he asked quickly.

“Oh, there’s been an accident. Some fisherman—Gideon, I believe they call him—has cut himself quite badly, and they want you. I said I’d try to find you, and Aunt Aurelia said you had left word you were coming here. So I hitched the horse, and drove up. But, oh! how slow he was! Come, I’ll drive you over to—to Gideon’s, if you know where he lives, or who he is. They only gave me the name Gideon.”

“Yes, I know—Gideon Flack! I’ll come at once. Good-by, Jess,” and he hurried off with Florence Denmore, while Jess, watching them, with a queer light in her eyes, murmured, a little bitterly:

“He used to call me his assistant; he has another one—now.”

CHAPTER XII

THE REVELATION

HARRY MATTHEWS strolled from Mrs. Neal's cottage, and walked toward the village.

"It's too early for the mail," he remarked, as he looked out over the ocean, "but I can't stand her talk any longer. No wonder Neal doesn't work. She must have killed all his energy. Hello, that looks like Ford's car! It is!" he exclaimed a moment later, as the big machine headed toward him. "He's down again. What in blazes makes him hang around? I'd think it was Jess, if I didn't know differently."

"Hello, Harry!" called Ford cheerfully. "Hop in!"

"I'm only going for the mail."

"I'll run you down, and then we'll have a spin. Jove! It's good to breathe the salt air again."

"Yes, seeing that it's only about twelve hours since you were here before," spoke Matthews dryly.

"There is a charm about the place," admitted

Ford, as if determined not to understand his friend's meaning. "I think it must be the air."

"Probably," and Matthews shot a quick look at his chum.

"Any nearer the end of the quest?" went on Ford genially.

"No. I expect some letters on this mail."

"Oh!" There was a curious note in Ford's voice, but his companion evidently did not notice it.

"I suppose you hope she'll relent and marry you, if you succeed in proving her the daughter of a millionaire," said Newton, as they swung into the street leading to the postoffice.

"I wish she would."

"Are you going to ask her again?"

"I am."

"But suppose she turns out to be related to some one even poorer or humbler than Daddy Jed?"

"It wouldn't make any difference."

"Oh!" Once more that queer exclamation.

The mail was not in, and the two sat in the car idly talking while waiting for it. Finally some one descried the stage coming along in a cloud of dust.

"Thar she blows!" cried Captain Josiah, who had once been on a whaler.

There was a sudden activity among the waiting throng. The stage rumbled up, and there was nervous expectation while the mail was sorted.

Harry Matthews came out with a bundle of letters, for he had hired a box in the postoffice when he began his systematic inquiry after the secret that enfolded Jess Blowden.

"You did get some answers," remarked Newton.

"Yes; I don't imagine they amount to anything, though. I'm beginning to give up. Run the car down to the shore, and we'll look 'em over. It's more quiet there."

The auto was swung around. Matthews began idly sorting the letters. He tore them open, one by one. They were soon read, for they contained only negative news. But when he came to a missive in a larger envelope—one that seemed to contain several papers, his companion stopped the car, alighted, and walked up and down on the sand. Matthews did not notice him. He was reading eagerly.

The attention of Newton was suddenly drawn to his friend by an exclamation which he made. Harry sat in the car, staring at a letter.

"My God! It can't be true! It can't!" he gasped.

"What's up, old man?" asked Newton quickly and with ready sympathy. "Is it bad news?"

"Read!" said Matthews hoarsely, and he extended the letter. Ford Newton perused it slowly. This was it:

"DEAR SIR:

Your circular letter of inquiry, regarding the identity of a child, picked up on the beach at Harbor Hill, about eighteen years ago, has been turned over to me by the chief of police, to whom you sent it. The reason for that was that I happened to be in the chief's office when your letter and circular came in.

"I was at once struck by a peculiar coincidence, and told the chief so. This was that the sight of the photographic reproduction of the scrap of paper, found in the baby's hand, at once recalled to my mind a case I had come across in rummaging through some of my father's papers recently. It seemed almost providential, and I told the chief that I would look into the matter. I did, with a most surprising result.

"My father, the late Rudolph Steger, had a large law practice, to which I succeeded. Among his cases was that of a client, who, I believe, will prove to be the mother of the child you refer to—who, as you now state, is a young lady, very desirous of learning her true identity. In brief, this is the case:

"About twenty years ago, a Miss Margaret Winsley lived in this town. She was a beautiful girl, and was much in society. It was rumored that she had had several offers of marriage, so I gather from

my father's notes, but remained free until a certain Englishman came here. He was—or said he was—a captain in the British army, Redmond Carews, by name, and certainly he disported himself like one. I dimly remember him. He fell in love with Miss Winsley, and they were married, or were supposed to have been—rather suddenly. It was a clandestine affair, for Miss Winsley's parents did not care for the captain, who was a dashing, handsome, but reckless fellow.

"It was a runaway match, and ended as most of those things do—unhappily. The captain grew tired of the girl and left her, after writing a letter, a copy of which I enclose, having found it among my father's papers on the sad case. It developed that the captain was a scoundrel, and had deceived Miss Winsley by a mock marriage.

"Of course she was broken hearted when she found herself deserted, and realized that she had been deceived, and she came to my father for advice, as he was an old friend of the family, as well as the legal adviser.

"Some time after her baby was born, the deceived mother became ill, and her parents both died, broken-hearted. She was left practically alone in the world, and with little means, there being no near relatives.

"Miss Winsley finally recovered, and resolved to

set out for England (whither the captain had gone), to plead with him. She went against my father's advice, taking the child, then a mere baby, with her. She managed to scrape together the money for her passage, for she would accept none of the funds left for her by Carews, as he states in his letter, a copy of which you will find herewith, and a piece from the torn original of which was evidently in the baby's hand when she came ashore.

"I should judge, by what you have told me, that the mother was washed overboard, or jumped, with her baby in her arms, shortly after having taken out the letter to read, as she stood on deck. Of course, that is only surmise, but the facts seem to bear it out.

"At any rate, from the time Miss Winsley and her baby left this place, we never heard anything more of them until your circular arrived. I am very sorry I have no better news for you, and that the identity of the young lady cannot be cleared up in a better manner. But these are the facts. There was no marriage, and what name the girl, known only as Jess, can bear, is problematical. If there is anything else in which I can serve you, please let me know.

"There are no relatives of the Winsleys here now, nor have I been able to trace any by going over my father's papers. As for Captain Carews,

he left no clues here beyond the letter, and the address of his lawyers, which firm has since dissolved, both partners being dead. I doubt if Carews could be traced in England, as he probably used a false name. It is rather a sad case, on the whole.

"Hoping I have been able to clear up the mystery for you, though not in the manner I could wish, I beg to remain,

"Yours very truly,

"MAX STEGER."

"Did you read it?" asked Matthews hoarsely, when his friend handed back the letter.

"Yes. Where is it from?"

"Cressville, Indiana. One of the little towns to which I sent a circular. My God! I didn't think it would turn out this way!"

"Where is the copy he speaks of?" asked Newton softly.

Without a word, Matthews passed it over. Ford Newton read it slowly.

"DEAR MARGARET:

"By this you will know what a faithless scamp I am. I'm very much cut up about it, I assure you, but I can't help myself. I have just received word that I am heir to my uncle's estate in England, but it

is contingent upon my marrying a certain girl, who has large land holdings that adjoin his.

"Of course you know how it was between us. It's beastly tough on the baby, but I have left some money for you with a firm of solicitors in Cressville. Just write a line to me, and address it as below, and the lawyers will get it. I left word to that effect with the postal people before I went away—and I'm deucedly sorry I have to go, for I do love you.

"Don't try to follow me—I admit I have been a scamp, but it is better to end it all now. I was weak—but I loved you.

"Of course, you realize by this time there was no marriage, and while I'm cut up about it and sorry, it is no worse than other people put up with.

"Kiss baby for me.

"Yours regretfully,

"REDMOND CAREWS,

"P. O. Box 278,

Cressville,

"Ind."

"What's that odd, irregular line for, on the bottom edge of the captain's letter?" asked Newton, as he handed it back to Matthews.

"That's to indicate where the fragment was torn off, I suppose—the part that was in the baby's hand—the part that we worked from. But, my God!

If I had known it would turn out this way, I'd never have started on it! It's awful! What will she say?"

"I—I guess you won't want to marry her now, will you?" asked Newton softly, and there was a queer look in his eyes."

"Marry her? Marry her now? I'd marry Jess this minute, if she'd have me!"

"You would—with this disclosure?"

"Yes! What do I care for that? It's Jess I want, not her parents, though I'd like to have that rascally captain by the throat! It's Jess I want!"

"And you'd marry her now, after this evidence?"

"Of course! What do I care about that evidence? There!" and with rapid motions Matthews tore the paper to shreds and scattered them over the sands. "I'd marry her anyhow! Oh, Jess! Jess!" and he held out his arms toward the lighthouse, wherein the beacon had just been set aglow by Daddy Jed.

"Come," said Newton gently, as he got in the car beside his friend, and steered up from the sands on which the evening shadows were lengthening.

CHAPTER XIII

SOME SCRAPS OF PAPER

DADDY JED came from the lighthouse cottage after his night's vigil over the beacon. Outside the sun was shining on the sands and glinting from the rolling wave-crests of the cove.

"Where are you going, Daddy?" called Jess, who, with an apron that enveloped her from her neck to her shoes, was at the stove, whence came certain savory odors, in which coffee and bacon struggled for supremacy.

"Oh, jest down th' beach a way t' stretch my legs. That there rheumatism certainly ain't gittin' no better. I'll have t' git Doc t' give me some different medicine."

"That's what you've been saying for the past year; poor Daddy! I wish you could get some relief. But I'll have some hot coffee for you soon. Don't be long away."

"Nope; I'm jest goin' down th' beach a short piece. It's goin' t' be a fine day, but we're in fer a storm. I reckon that's what makes th' rheumatism

so bad all on a suddint'. I'll be right back. Wa'al, I swan! Ef there ain't ole Cap'n Josiah out this early with his clam hoe. Guess he ain't havin' much luck these days. Th' beach is pretty nigh dug out. He ought t' go out in a boat, but he's too old, I expect—too old—like myself! Wa'al, it can't be helped, I reckon," and, sighing softly, the lighthouse keeper trudged on down the sands.

At times he stopped to watch the fishhawks circling high over the bay, seeking with keen eyes for a sight of some wriggling eel or darting fish before venturing near enough to the water to warrant a sudden swoop downward. Occasionally one of the big birds would drop like a shot, to rise on flapping pinions with a struggling prize in his talons.

"That feller got a big one!" exclaimed Daddy Jed, as he watched a hawk fly over his head with a fish which was almost too much for the bird. "Dunno but what it'd be a good plan t' train one of them critters in so's he'd fish fer a feller," he mused.

Then he resumed his halting walk, looking to where old Captain Josiah was bending over, grubbing in the wet sand and mud for the soft clams.

"Back-breakin' work—back-breakin' work!" murmured Jed. "But that's th' way with th' sea. All ye git from her ye have t' struggle fer. Seem's like when th' sea got a grip on anything, even t' soft clams, she likes t' keep it!"

He watched the sun creeping higher in the sky, looked at the increasing number of fish-hawks circling about, noted the signs of a storm gathering in the southeast, and then walked on, kicking idly at bits of driftwood, clumps of seaweed and shells, a dead star-fish, and a horseshoe crab, left stranded by the tide.

Then, up on the dry sands, above high-water mark, Daddy Jed caught sight of a little pile of torn paper. There had been no wind, and the scraps were not scattered.

"Th' tide didn't bring that up," murmured the keeper, as, with ready eye, he noted how far up on the beach it was, and that the paper showed no signs of having been wet. "Some one must have been tearin' up letters," he went on, as he neared the place, "some one in an automobile, too," he added, as he noted in the sand the marks of the big rubber-tired wheels.

"Ain't many folks around here got them rigs," Daddy Jed resumed, as he idly turned over with his foot the scraps of paper. "Guess that Matthews feller and his friend must have been here. Likely they tore up the stuff. Wonder what they're hangin' around here so much fer, anyhow? 'Tain't no great amount of attraction in Harbor Hill fer sech fellers as them."

As he idly stirred the papers with his foot, a little

puff of wind, perchance a forerunner of the storm to come, caught the scraps, and, in a sudden swirl, lifted a fragment, circling it about, until it floated past Daddy Jed. Idly he put out his hand, and, as if it had been a butterfly, he imprisoned the paper.

Still idly the old man gazed at it—gazed at it unseeingly, until, with a start, he caught the name of Jess on it.

"Jess! Jess!" he whispered hoarsely, looking around as if fearful that some one would see him. "Jess! Jess! Her name on these papers!—papers them automobile fellers has throwed away! Jess! What does it mean?"

With another hurried glance around, he dropped to his knees and began gathering up the scraps. He could not read well without his glasses, but he caught occasional words. Then he found a large piece—it was a reproduction of part of the bit of paper which had been taken from the tiny hand of Jess when he found her on the beach in the storm. Then, like a flash, it came to him.

"It's a part of what she's been doin' these last few weeks!" he whispered to himself. "Part of what she's been tryin' t' find out. That automobile feller's been helpin' her. This is one of them printed letters she sent!

"I—I wonder if it's any clew? No, it couldn't be, or they wouldn't have throwed it away. But, may-

be—maybe, I kin find out suthin' from it. Jess don't want me t' know, but maybe I kin find out! I'll do some investigatin' on my own hook, as soon as I see how it's done. I'll git Hank Stickleton t' help me. That's what I'll do. I'll take these scraps home an' piece 'em t'gether. Then maybe I kin learn how it's done, an' I kin start an inquiry of my own.

"Jess wants t' find out who she is. I don't, fer I'm satisfied t' keep her jest as she be! But maybe I kin save her from knowin' any bad news, if such there be comin'."

He was rapidly gathering up the fragments, looking eagerly about, lest he miss one. He worked feverishly, peering around now and then for fear some one would surprise him at his odd task.

"I'll take 'em home," he murmured; "take 'em home, an' hide 'em away from Jess. Then I'll piece 'em t'gether like them map puzzles we used t' have when I was a boy. I'll find out how Jess an' that automobile feller does this thing, fer they'll never tell me; an' then me an' Hank will start one ourselves.

"Oh, but s'posin I do find out th' truth! S'posin' I locate th' folks Jess belongs to! She'll leave me—leave me all alone, an'—an'—I can't stand that!"

He paused in his work of gathering up the papers. He had most of them now, though the wind was

rising and scattering them about. A little later and they would have been blown into the sea.

"Yes—yes, I'll do it," muttered Daddy Jed. "Better t' *know* an' have it over with, than all this uncertainty. I'll start an inquiry on my own hook—me an' Hank."

He looked about to see that he had the last of the small scraps. As he picked up one that had blown some distance away, he heard footsteps, and turned, with a sudden start, like a guilty man.

"Ha, Daddy Jed! Pickin' up shells?" asked a voice.

"Shells! Ho! Yes, shells!" answered the light-house keeper, as he saw Captain Josiah with his dripping basket of clams. "Yep; gatherin' shells," and with the last scrap of paper Daddy Jed picked up a pink shell, to give color to his words.

"Beginnin' kinder later in life, ain't ye, Jed?"

"Yes, maybe—that is, I dunno—I were jest walkin' along, waitin' fer Jess t' call me t' breakfast, an' I jest saw some—er—some shells, an' I picked 'em up. Git many clams, Josiah?" and Daddy Jed, with a quick motion, thrust into his pocket, along with the other pieces of paper, the last scrap he had picked up. He glanced apprehensively at the clammer, who was regarding Daddy Jed curiously.

"No; ain't hardly wuth while t' come down at low water any more," was the despondent reply. "Didn't

git more'n four quarts. I ought t' have a boat, an' go out on th' sand bar. Then I could git some good fat ones. Folks don't like t' buy my little ones that I dig out on th' beach. But what's a man goin' t' do when he gits old, Jed?"

"I dunno, Josiah; I dunno. We're both gittin' there pretty middlin' fast. I were jest walkin' along, an'——"

A blast from a conch horn broke into the halting talk of the lighthouse keeper, and, with an air of relief, he turned away.

"Breakfust is ready," he announced. "I've got t' go. Mustn't keep Jess waitin'."

"No," agreed the captain, as he walked toward another spot on the beach, where he intended to dig once more for the elusive soft clams.

And, as Daddy Jed trudged homeward, he cast several looks back, to see if he had missed any of the scraps of paper. There was an odd elation in his manner. He seemed to straighten up, and he almost forgot his rheumatism until a sudden motion recalled it forcibly to his mind.

"Well, Daddy, you must have gone quite a way down the beach," spoke Jess with gentle reproof, as he entered the cottage. "I had to put the bacon and eggs in the oven to keep warm for you."

"Yes, I reckon I did go farther than I meant to," he admitted, as he hung his coat on a peg, and drew

up his chair. "I met Captain Josiah, an' him an' me was talkin'. It's goin' t' storm, Jess."

"Yes, I thought so from the way the wind has come up," she replied, and then they had breakfast, while Jess wondered what made Daddy Jed so thoughtful.

As she went to the stove, to get him a second cup of coffee, she brushed against his coat, which hung from a nail. A rent in the sleeve caught her eye.

"Why, Daddy Jed! Your coat's torn!" she exclaimed, as she lifted it down to examine it. "I must sew it at once. How did it happen?"

"Caught it on a hook up in th' lantern room last night, Jess," he explained, as he hurriedly arose from his chair. "But it don't need fixin'—leastways not now. I'll put it on—I—I'm a bit chilly," and, while she was examining it, he gently took it from her, and donned it, though the garment was too heavy for the house, and was only worn as a protection to his rheumatic joints, when he went out in the early morning, or when it was cool in the lantern tower.

"Oh, but I must fix it for you," insisted the girl.

"Not now," spoke Daddy Jed quickly, as his hand went quickly into one of the pockets, and felt the scraps of paper.

Humoring him, Jess kept on her way to the

kitchen, while Jed wiped a few drops of perspiration from his forehead. Yet he had complained of being chilly.

"She—she mustn't know what I'm up to," he murmured. "I must keep it a secret—maybe it won't amount t' nothin'. I hope it don't, but she mustn't know. I ought t' have knowed better than t' hang th' coat where she'd see it, with them paper scraps in th' pocket."

"I'll sew the rip up, right after breakfast," went on Jess, as she returned with the coffee. "It will be warmer then, and, besides, you always wear your old coat when you clean the lens. I'll fix it for you, Daddy."

"All right, Jess. I'll let ye have it—shortly," and, lest she take possession of it by main force, he buttoned his coat tightly around him, and got up from the table to go to his own room, leaving his second cup of coffee half-finished, a thing he had never done before.

Jess was busy with her own thoughts, or perhaps the unusual conduct of Daddy Jed would have made her suspicious. At it was, she paid little attention to him, and, when he remained in his room rather longer than usual, she gave no heed to it.

As for Jed, he had carefully taken the scraps of paper from his pocket, and put them in a tin box, which contained his few earthly treasures, including

some of his wife's letters, his certificate of appointment as lighthouse keeper, a lock of Jess's hair when she was a baby, and another of the dead daughter, Mollie. And this box he carefully locked before he came out of the room, carrying the torn coat.

"Now ye kin mend it, Jess," he said, as he handed the garment to her. "It's got some warmer, I reckon, an' I sha'n't need it right away. I'm goin' t' clean th' lens now," and he slowly made his way up into the lantern room.

Jess went over to see Helen Byington that afternoon. She found Dr. Ralph there, and waited in a little arbor until he came out before she ventured in. Miss Byington was not in sight.

"How is your patient doing?" she asked, when she saw him approaching, and there was the hint of coldness in her voice, for there had been gossip which reached her, of the physician being frequently seen out with Miss Denmore.

"Very well, indeed," was his answer, and, though Dr. Hammond was very cordial, Jess thought he had answered her more with the impersonal ardor of a physician concerning his case, than as a friend—and a very close friend.

"Then you think she will get better?"

"I have great hopes. You see, it's my first case on which I have tried my new nerve theory, and I am working a little in the dark. But I have great

hopes! If I could only get her mind a little easier. She seems to be brooding over something—I wish I could find out what it was.”

Dr. Hammond looked worried. It was not like him, either, for in many of his very worst cases, Jess had known him to be optimistic and cheerful, even when the angel of death was hovering nearby. It was one of his strongest assets as a physician.

But now there was a change. She could not help but notice it. Could it be the result of the energy which he was expending on his book—on his new method of treating nervous diseases? It might be so. Then there was his absent-mindedness. That was new. And the careworn look about his eyes—the stoop of his shoulders—seemed to have increased.

For the first time, since she had known him, Jess noticed, too, that his tie was quite awry. Usually it was fastened so neatly. Now, even the little coral pin she had given him one birthday was gone. There was a little pain in her heart, as she became aware of its absence.

“Ralph?” she asked softly, “are—are you worried about her—about Helen?”

“Well—yes, in a measure,” he admitted rather unwillingly, and he did not look at Jess. “If I could only find out what she is brooding over, it might help me to understand. I don’t want to ask her, and,

though I've hinted as broadly as I dare, she still maintains a silence."

He sighed, and Jess wondered more than ever what was troubling him.

"I wish she would tell me," he went on, walking moodily toward the side of the little arbor.

"Suppose I try?" suggested Jess, for she alone knew of the something between Miss Byington and Harry Matthews, though even Jess did not know exactly what it was.

"I wish you would," said Dr. Ralph eagerly. "I was saying to Florence—Miss Denmore—the other day, that if I could get Miss Byington's mind at ease I know I could cure her."

He was drawing on his gloves, and he did not notice the start Jess gave at the mention of Miss Denmore's name, nor how she seemed to stiffen and draw away from him.

"Florence is very much interested in the case," went on the physician.

"I suppose she is—in all your cases," spoke Jess in a cool voice.

"Yes—er—that is——" Dr. Hammond paused, and glanced sharply at the girl beside him. A shrewd look came into his eyes, and there was just the hint of a smile on his bronzed face—a face which did not conceal its emotions under a beard or moustache.

"Jess," went on the doctor eagerly, and, in his very eagerness, he gently took hold of her arm, "Jess, you remember a certain question I once asked you?"

She started and blushed.

"If you please——" she began.

"I only want to ask now," he interrupted, "whether you are still pursuing your quest?"

"Yes," she said gently.

"And—have you any hope?"

"Not as much as I had."

"Aren't you going to give up—soon?"

"Perhaps." He could scarcely hear her words.

"And when you do—when you are satisfied to be Jess of Harbor Hill—may I—may I ask you a certain question again?"

He had taken her hand in his ungloved one, and was trying to look into her downcast eyes.

"May I?" he persisted.

"If—if you like," she whispered, and then came a voice from the box-lined walk.

"What are you people discussing so earnestly? Is my case so desperate that it requires a consultation?" and, with a laugh, Miss Byington came limping slowly into view. She stopped in some confusion, for she saw Dr. Hammond drop the hand of Jess, and saw the latter turn blushing away.

"Oh, I've forgotten my shawl—I'll be back di-

rectly!" exclaimed the intruder in changed tones, as she turned back quickly.

"Wait," called Jess sharply. "Dr. Hammond is going. I came to see you, Helen."

Miss Byington halted, just out of sight.

"You won't forget your promise, Jess?" whispered the doctor.

She shook her head, flashed a look at him from her glorious eyes, and went to join the invalid.

CHAPTER XIV

CONFIDENCES

"JESS, dear," and Helen placed an arm about the waist of her new-found friend, "Jess, dear, have you anything to tell me?"

"Tell you, Helen?"

"Yes, about—— Oh, wasn't it stupid of me to come along just at that time? Oh, I'm *sure* you have something to tell me, dear!"

"Why, no," and Jess looked puzzled. "Oh, you mean about Dr. Hammond?" Her face lighted up.

"Dr. Hammond? Is *that* all you call him. Why, *everyone* calls him that—I mean all his patients."

"Oh, of course he's Ralph to me, and lots of others—nearly every one in Harbor Hill, in fact, but——"

"Oh, of course, Jess, if you don't want to say anything about it, why—but I thought from what I so stupidly interrupted——"

Jess laughed.

"Oh, Helen, dear, it's not as serious as all that,"

she said. "I know it did look a bit solemn, and engagey, and all that, but—well, I may as well tell you—I haven't another confidant in Harbor Hill, save Daddy Jed, and I don't want to tell him—just yet.

"It's this way: Dr. Ralph did ask me to marry him—not now, but some time ago, and——"

"You've been keeping him all this while waiting for an answer! Oh, Jess!"

"No, I answered him at once. I said I couldn't marry him until this mystery about myself was cleared up—you know what I mean."

"Yes, I have heard the story. It's very romantic."

"Not so romantic as it's uncertain," replied Jess. "It's dreadful not to know who you are."

"Sometimes it's better that way," returned Helen in a low voice. "Yet I know how you feel, Jess. I do hope it turns out all right, and that you can make Dr. Hammond happy. How are you coming on with the search? Isn't it odd that—that Mr. Matthews should be helping you?"

She winced at the name. Jess saw the opening she desired.

"Helen, dear," she began softly, "haven't you something to tell *me*?"

"Something to tell you, Jess?"

"Yes, about Mr. Matthews. I have guessed so

much that I know must be wrong, and I'd be *so* glad to know the truth, if you care to tell me."

"I—I don't think I can—or care to—Jess. It's—it's too dreadful," and Miss Byington, burying her face on the shoulder of her friend, burst into tears.

"Oh, forgive me! I didn't mean to call up unpleasant memories!" exclaimed Jess. "I only wanted to help you. Dr. Ralph said he thought that if you were made easier in your mind you might recover more quickly."

"He said that?" and Helen raised her tear-stained face—a face that was beginning to regain some of the beauty lost through suffering and disease.

"Yes," and Jess gently stroked Helen's hair.

"Oh, if I only could—if I only *could* wipe out the past!" she exclaimed. "But I can't—no one can. He will never care for me again!"

There was silence between the two girls for a little while, and then Helen suddenly asked:

"Jess, dear, will you tell me the truth, if I ask you a certain question?"

"I will—if I can."

"Has Harry—Mr. Matthews—ever made love to you?" There was a fierce longing in the eyes of the invalid.

Jess drew her breath sharply. What would her

answer mean to Helen? Yet she could only speak the truth.

"He—he asked me to marry him," said Jess softly.

Helen caught her breath sharply.

"And—and——" she dared not ask what trembled on her lips.

"I gave him the same answer I gave to Ralph. I said I must first learn who I was."

"Jess, do you—do you love him?"

"Who?"

"Harry—Mr. Matthews—do you love him?"

"I—I——" began Jess, when there came an interruption in the shape of a raucous voice exclaiming:

"Well, I thought nobody was t' hum! I've been knockin' an' knockin' at th' side door, but Mrs. Newcomb must 'a' stepped out. Oh. howdy, Jess! I didn't know you was here, an'——"

Mrs. Neal paused suggestively, and glanced at Helen Byington. Hitherto the fact that the invalid was an inmate of the cottage on the cliff was known only to a few, for the Widow Newcomb was not in the habit of going to the village, and she had only a few callers. So it is doubtful if any one outside of the girl's own friends, Jess, Jed and Dr. Hammond, knew of her presence in Harbor Hill. But now it was likely to be blazoned from the house-

tops, for Samantha Neal would gossip it all over the place.

"I—I don't think I've had th' pleasure of meetin' you, Miss," began Mrs. Neal, when she saw that her suggestive pause was not likely to bear fruit. "Have you been long in Harbor Hill, Miss—er—I didn't catch your name."

"She is here for her health," said Jess quickly, making Helen a motion to remain silent. "She has been too long outside now, I fear. You had better go in, dear," she added, and, as Miss Byington arose, and glided from the arbor where she and Jess had been seated, the latter took Mrs. Neal in hand, and by means of rapidly asking many questions concerning the welfare of nearly every one in Harbor Hill, contrived to hold the attention of the gossiping old lady until Helen was safely in the house.

"I didn't know Mrs. Newcomb took boarders," said Samantha, when she had a chance to veer back to the subject nearest her thoughts. "She looked like a nice young person. I'd like to meet her."

"She is not very strong," retorted Jess quickly. "I am going down to the lighthouse. I suppose you are coming, Mrs. Neal. Daddy Jed will be glad to see you."

"I come t' see Mrs. Newcomb, an' I guess I'll wait until she gits back," decided the gossip.

"Likely she's stepped out t' some neighbor's. I'll wait, but don't let me keep you, Jess." There was a crafty smile on her face.

Jess, however, was not to be outgeneraled in this fashion. She knew that once the coast was clear, Mrs. Neal would quickly move upon Helen, with all her guns unmasked, and, under the skillful cross-questioning to which she would be subjected, Miss Byington's secret would be one no longer. Harry Matthews would learn of her presence in Harbor Hill, and all the work Dr. Hammond had done might go for naught.

So Jess stayed, remaining as guard, until Mrs. Newcomb returned from an errand, and then, with a few words of warning, the lighthouse lass took her departure. Mrs. Neal tried her best to penetrate the reserve of Mrs. Newcomb, regarding her boarder, but the widow was more than a match for the insistent, if well-meaning gossip, who left without having even learned Helen's name, Mrs. Newcomb excusing herself for not giving it by saying that her guest preferred to remain in seclusion.

"Why, I never heard tell of sich a thing in all my born days!" exclaimed Samanthly to Mrs. Blodgett, a little later. "She wouldn't tell me *nothin'*—absolutely *nothin'* about that girl, though I hinted all I knowed how, an' finally I out an' out *asted* who she was! Jess Blowden wouldn't say anythin', either,

an' I believe she deliberately sent that girl away when I come in."

"Perhaps she doesn't want to be known," suggested Mrs. Blodgett timidly, for she feared Mrs. Neal's tongue.

"That's it! There's some secret goin' on, but I'll find out what it is, or my name ain't Samantha Neal! I'll git at th' bottom of it! I been goin' t' have Doc Hammond in t' prescribe fer me this good while, an' now I'll do it, an' if I can't git it out of him what ails that girl, an' how long she's been here unbeknownst t' me, an' what she's stayin' here fer, then I miss my guess! The idea of havin' such queer things goin' on in Harbor Hill, an' me knowin' nothin' about it! The very idea!"

Samantha Neal bristled with impotent rage, and at once set her plans in operation. She called in Dr. Hammond, and he, not knowing any need for special secrecy, since Jess had not told him about what Helen had let fall concerning Harry Matthews, related to Mrs. Neal as much as he could professionally, about the stranger. Though, at best Dr. Hammond knew little, and only revealed her name, the circumstances under which Miss Byington arrived, and in conclusion stated that she was endeavoring to recover her health.

Any one else, under the dragging out process to which Mrs. Neal subjected him, would have told

more, but Dr. Hammond knew the gossipy woman, and was discreet. However, Mrs. Neal had found out something.

"But there's more to it," she assured Mrs. Blodgett. "I ain't got t' th' bottom of it yit. This Miss Byington—an' what a stuck-up name it is—she comes from Boston. Mr. Matthews, who boards with me, has often been there. I'm goin' t' speak t' him about it. I shouldn't wonder but what he'd know suthin'."

Mrs. Neal was more than gratified at the surprise Harry Matthews displayed when he heard the name of Mrs. Newcomb's boarder.

"What, Helen—Miss Byington here!" he ejaculated. "It isn't possible, Mrs. Neal!"

"Yes, it is! She's up at Mrs. Newcomb's, on th' cliff, an' she's been there some time. Why, did you know her in Boston?"

"I knew her. Oh, by Jove! I forgot to mail those letters!" and, with that as an excuse, Matthews fairly rushed out of the house; retiring under fire, as it were.

"Helen here—here!" he gasped, as he hurried down the road in the semi-darkness. "I—I wonder what it means? Can she have followed me? Yet that old gossip says she's been here some time. Why hasn't she revealed herself? Why is she in hiding?"

And Jess knows her—she and Jess have been together!

“Well,” he went on, as he slowed down his pace, when he felt that he was safe from Mrs. Neal, “I give up! I don’t know what to make of it! I wish Ford would run down. I think I’ll go up and see him!”

And, for the first time since the auto accident, Harry Matthews left Harbor Hill the next day, whereat there was no end of gossip.

Jess wondered what was going to happen, when she received from Boston a brief note from him, saying that he was still working on the quest he had undertaken for her, and would be back soon. He had said nothing to her about the startling information that had so unexpectedly come to him. In fact, Matthews was vainly seeking a way to conceal the truth regarding her identity, from the girl, and bring the matter to an end, telling her that it was useless to seek further to solve the mystery of the sea.

“Oh, so the spell is broken at last!” cried Ford Newton, when Harry burst in on him at his Boston lodgings, for business reasons necessitated that both young men maintain establishments in Boston and New York.

“There isn’t any particular spell that I know of,”

said Matthews a bit coldly, "and, such as there is, it isn't broken."

"You mean you are still determined to marry this girl?"

"If Jess will have me—yes. But I didn't come up to talk about that. Helen Byington is in Harbor Hill!"

"The deuce you say!"

"Yes, and she's been there for some time. I wonder what she wants? If she queers me with Jess——"

"Too late for that, now. If she wanted to do that, it's already done, but I don't believe it. Helen isn't that kind of a girl, in spite of your treatment of her. What's to be done?"

"I don't know. Can't you advise me?"

"I'd rather not. Anyhow, I'm glad to see you up from that place. Going to stay here?"

"No; I just ran up for the day. Come back with me; why don't you? It's glorious at Harbor Hill now. Come back."

"I don't know—I might, just to keep you safe and sane. But come out, and get a white-man's dinner. I should think you'd hate to look a clam in the face, if clams have such a part of anatomy."

They went to a fashionable restaurant, and Matthews remained with his friend that night. In the morning, by train, for Ford's car was out of com-

mission in consequence of a collision, they went back to Portaby.

They talked of many things, but always the conversation veered around to Jess—or Helen.

"You certainly are a very faithful knight," mocked Ford, "to want to marry the lighthouse lass after what happened. Most men would be glad to veer off."

"Hush! Confound it! Do you want to tell the whole car?" and there was an annoyed tone in the voice of Matthews. The two talked in lower tones, but the mischief had been done.

Two seats back of them, having boarded the train at a way-station, sat Dr. Ralph Hammond. He caught the fateful words Ford Newton had spoken, and over his face there came a red flush—a flush of anger and dismay. Then he paled, and he was conscious of a dull pain—not in his heart—he was too sensible to ascribe any such feeling to that muscular organ—but somehow he felt as if the sun had suddenly darkened. He went quickly into another car, lest the two men whose confidences he had unwittingly overheard, should see him.

But, as the doctor crossed the platform, into another coach, the wheels, as they clicked over the rail joints, seemed to cry out aloud:

"Most men would want to veer off! Most men would want to veer off!"

What could it mean? What was there between Jess and this man? The doctor shuddered as he asked himself that question. The answer to it might mean a great deal.

CHAPTER XV

JESS FINDS OUT

CAPTAIN JOSIAH TURNELL hooked his clam basket over his left arm, and walked along toward the beach, swinging his short-handled hoe, for it was low tide, and he must dig the soft clams, from the sale of which he made a scanty living.

"I yum, but I hope I git some t'-day," he murmured, as he trudged along with the rolling gait acquired by many days and nights spent on the heaving decks of clamming and fishing schooners. "An' I reckon——" He stopped suddenly, and clapped a hand to a pocket in his ragged blue overalls. "I knowed it!" he exclaimed. "Tobacco's all gone! Wa'al, I guess it won't break me ef I stop in Hank's an' git a paper o' fine cut."

As the old clammer climbed up the steps, he was aware of rather high and excited voices in the "Emporium." The captain paused, for in commanding tones there floated out to him these words:

"Stop, villain that you are—villain twice; yea,

thrice double-dyed! Stop! Advance one step farther, and I will put a bullet through your cowardly heart! Yes, though I pay the dire penalty twice over. Once before have you crossed my path, and I spared you! Now it is the end! You must prepare to die!

"Ah, would you? Take your vile hands from that girl! Unhand her, I say! How dare you so much as look at, much less despoil, by your touch, the fair daughter of St. George Decameron—the lovely Bertha, who has promised to be my bride!

"Back! Back! One step more, and it will be your last! Ha! You shrink from me, and it is well you do shrink! For, by all the gods that on Olympus dwell, I will have your vile life, and it is Montmorency Gregory who speaks! Back! Back, I say, as you value your life!"

"Wa'al, I'll be——" began the startled captain. "There's a lunatic in there, as sure as my name is Josiah Turnell! I wonder if he's murdered Hank? Most likely he has. I'd better go git Jake Tyredon, an' have him took in. Jake's th' constable 'round here. By Heck! Fust off, I thought it were me th' lunatic were talkin' t'. Wonder how he got in Hank's store? Maybe he's murdered S. Rufus an' Reuben Tittlemore, as well as Hank!"

The captain hastily descended the steps, and ran to the blacksmith shop.

"Come on, Jake!" he cried. "Bring one of your heaviest sledge-hammers, too! Come quick!"

"What fer?" asked the smith slowly.

"Crazy lunatic in Hank's store! I were jest goin' in t' git a paper o' fine cut t' chaw, an' I heard th' most awful language! I reckon Hank's been killed, an' maybe his two clerks, too! Come on."

Wonderingly, but fully alive to the perils of the situation, Jake grasped a sledge and hurried after the captain, who had dropped his basket, but who still held the hoe, as a weapon of offense or defense, it was difficult to decide which.

"There's Gid Flack," went on the clammer, as he saw the ugly fisherman. "He's sober, too, an' I guess his cut's healed by this time. We'll git him t' help. Hey, Gid!" he called.

"Eh? What's up now?" demanded Gideon.

"Lunatic in Hank's store. Murdered everybody!" cried the blacksmith. "Come on, help capture him!"

Gideon needed no further incentive. He fell in with the two, making a trio, who cautiously approached the store.

"I'll go in back, an' you two kin tackle him from in front," said Captain Josiah.

"What's the matter with *you* goin' in from th' front?" asked the blacksmith querulously.

"'Cause ye allers has t' have yer attackin' party in two divisions," declared Josiah. "I served in th'

militia once, an' we learned that. I'll attack th' rear, an' you fellers come up in front."

"Oh—all right," assented the blacksmith weakly. "Go ahead. Are you with me, Gid?"

"Sure. But what's it all about?"

"Josiah heard him," was the answer. "He threatened him suthin' fearful, didn't he, Josiah?"

"He sure did. He called me——"

The captain's recital of what he had heard was interrupted by a voice coming from the opened door of the store, the interior of which, by reason of merchandise piled over the windows, was dark.

"Oh, spare me! Spare me!" some one pleaded. "I only ask my life at your hands, St. George Decameron! Spare me this once! Only this once!"

"There's two of 'em in there!" whispered the horrified captain. "Two of 'em! He ain't done th' murder yet! We're in time! That sounded like a woman critter askin' him t' spare her life! Come on, I'll go 'round back, an' you two kin go in th' front!"

"Wa'al, I reckon——" began the blacksmith, when once more the voice broke out:

"I have slain the one, and now I will slay the other! Prepare to die, Montmorency Gregory, for St. George Decameron knows no mercy!"

"By golly! They're goin' t' kill Hank!" cried Gideon Flack. "Come on, everybody!"

The three prepared to rush in, the captain aban-

doning his dual attack theory, when suddenly Hank Stickleton, the proprietor of the "Emporium," came leisurely around the corner of the establishment, having been out in his garden patch.

For a moment the three rescuers were struck dumb. At last the captain found his voice.

"Did ye—did ye escape from him? Are ye hurt?" he asked. "Did he shoot ye, or stab ye?"

"Huh?" asked Hank, his eyes opening wide, and his jaw falling.

"How'd ye escape?" asked the blacksmith, grasping his heavy sledge more tightly.

"Escape? Say, be you fellers crazy?" demanded Hank, glaring at them.

"No, but there's a lunatic in your store, an' if he ain't killed some one already he's on th' verge of doin' it!" cried Captain Josiah. "St. George Decameron is his name, an' he ain't got no mercy on nobody. He said so hisself! We heard him, didn't we, Jake? We're jest going t' tackle him!"

"St. George Decameron?" repeated Hank, while a light broke over his face.

At that moment there issued from the store the shrill voice of some one trying to sing the "Rosary" and making a very bad attempt of it.

"It's their dyin' song!" gasped Captain Josiah. "We're too late; th' deed has been did, fellers. The lunatic has murdered 'em!"

"By Jehosaphat! I'll do some deeds around here!" exclaimed Hank, with sudden energy. "It's them fool clerks of mine, doin' their opery an' theatrical business, instead of 'tendin' t' things. I'll fix 'em!"

He rushed toward the front door.

"Back! Back, I say, as you value your life!" cried a voice.

"Hold on, you'll be killed, Hank!" called the blacksmith.

"I reckon not," drawled Hank, and then he disappeared inside, while the rescuing trio, keeping well together, and entering the door as nearly at the same time as possible, saw S. Rufus Blodgett reading from a pile of manuscript, while Reuben Tittlemore was ruffling his long hair, and just breaking into another strain of the song, as he dusted the shelves laden with bolts of calico.

"What do you think of my last scene, Reuben?" S. Rufus was asking. "Isn't it startling when St. George Decameron says he has no mercy?"

"Yes; it's jest like when we ain't got Smith's soap, but we've got Jone's, which is jest as good," responded Reuben sarcastically. "But don't you think I did that song pretty well, Simon?"

"S. Rufus, if you please," interrupted the dramatist, and then Hank cried:

"Say, ef I ever catch you fellers spoutin' any

more of that fool theatre stuff, or singin' them mushy songs, I'll fire ye so quick ye won't know what happened! Now, both of ye git t' work, an' straighten out this store. It looks like it had been sent fer an' couldn't go. Th' minute my back is turned you go at that sloppy play of yourn, Simon, an——"

"S. Rufus, if you please!"

"No, I don't please. It's Simon, an' that's what I'm goin' t' call ye! If I catch ye recitin' any more of that play, I'll burn it up."

S. Rufus hurriedly put his pile of manuscript under the counter, and began to arrange some cans of peas, tomatoes and corn.

"An' you quit yer warblin', Reuben!" warned the proprietor. "I can't afford t' hire no grand opery tenor t' wait on my customers."

"Was it—was it them fellers we heard?" gasped Captain Josiah, reaching for his tobacco, and suddenly remembering he had none to solace him.

"Of course it were," declared Hank, with an air of disgust. "They make me sick! I'd fire 'em both ef I could git some one else."

"An' we thought it were a murder," said the blacksmith. "Wa'al, I'll be gum-swatted!"

He walked slowly from the store, followed by Gideon Flack, who wore a distinct air of disappointment. Captain Josiah shuffled hesitatingly

over to where Reuben Tittlemore was standing behind the counter.

"I'll have a paper of fine cut fer chawin', Reuben," said the clammer softly, and the clerk waited on him without a word, and without so much as humming a bar of one of the many songs he knew.

"Nice goin's on in a respectable store," murmured Hank, as the captain went out. And the clammer, picking up his basket and proceeding on toward the beach, thought so, too.

It was an unusually low tide, and, as he waded out over the sand and mud flats to the edge of the lapping water, sinking down some distance with his hip rubber boots, the captain glanced toward the lighthouse.

"Old Jed's up in the lantern room," he murmured, as he saw a figure moving about behind the lenses. "He's cleanin' up kinder early t'-day," for, in Harbor Hill, there was a time for everything, and everything was done on time, even to the serving of meals. Many things were regulated by the tides, and, as the hour of high and low water was known to even the children, the rise and fall had come to be regarded as a sort of clock.

If it was low water, the clammers were to be seen on the beach. If it was high water, every one knew the fishing boats would come up to the dock. There was an hour when Daddy Jed always cleaned

the glass of the big lantern, and now, to see him at this labor, ahead of his usual time, was rather of a shock to the captain.

"Must be his clock's wrong, or else he's goin' away an' wants t' git it done," he mused. "Wa'al, I'll jest step up, arter I git my clams, an' see what's goin' on," for what was one person's business in Harbor Hill was that of as many other persons as could find it convenient to make it so.

But Captain Josiah was not the only one who wondered at the early activity of Jed in cleaning the big lenses. Soon after breakfast he had gone up to the lantern room, carrying with him a small tin box.

"Aren't you rather early, Daddy?" asked Jess, as she cleared away the breakfast dishes.

"Mebby—mebby," he answered, without looking at her. "But th' glass is uncommon dirty, somehow or other."

"Why, Daddy Jed!" she exclaimed, for he was like a woman with the care of fine china, and the lenses were always as clear as crystal. "The glass hardly needs touching!"

"Wa'al, I got a letter or two t' write, an' I—I kinder thought I'd do it up there, where it was quiet," he added lamely.

"A letter? Shall I help you, Daddy?" for she knew his hand was none too steady.

"No, Jess; I reckon I kin do it. I'll be up there some time."

She noticed that besides his tin box of treasures he carried a bottle of mucilage newly purchased at Hank's store, and she wondered what it was for.

Several days had passed since Daddy Jed had picked up the scraps of paper on the beach. He had been waiting for an opportunity of going over them carefully, and piecing them together, but the chance had not come. Now he resolved to wait no longer. He would learn how Jess and Matthews had proceeded with their quest, and, with the aid of Hank Stickleton, he would start a counter search.

"An' it won't make no difference t' me, what I find out about her," he said to himself, "'cause she's my Jess, same as she has been ever since I picked her up on th' beach, like a crab; an' I've kept her ever sence, an' I allers aim to, fer I ain't got nobody but Jess!"

To satisfy his conscience for what he had said, Jed did give the lenses a little rub. Then, looking from the tower, and noting old Josiah digging his clams, the lighthouse keeper sat down before the broad stone window ledge, and spread the scraps of paper out before him. Next he adjusted his powerful spectacles, seen through which his eyes resembled those of the octopus, so round and saucer-like were they.

"Now, I'll jest piece these together, an' stick 'em on a sheet of blank paper," he mused, unfolding a brown wrapper he had secured from Hank's grocery counter.

It was slow work at first, for there were many small fragments, but soon Jed got to the larger ones, where Matthews had torn the letter rapidly, and the task proceeded more quickly. As the lighthouse keeper had said, it was like putting together the sectional map puzzles in vogue when he was a lad. The letter and circular were in typewriting, and he could easily read, but he deferred this part of his task until he had it all together.

Slowly he was bringing order out of chaos. Eagerly he went on with the work. He did not hear a light footstep on the stone stair of the tower. He was unaware of the swishing of skirts, and he did not know that Jess was in the room until she had placed her cool hands over his eyes, shutting out his vision. He started in alarm, as she cried:

"Why, Daddy Jed! I thought you were going to write a letter, and, instead, I find you piecing one together!"

"Yes—yes, Jess!" he stammered guiltily. "I—I were sort of amusin' myself. I—I found these scraps, an' I wanted t' see ef I could make sense of 'em. But it ain't nothin' fer ye! I kin do it!"

He tried to sweep the pieces together, into the .

tin box, but they were too scattered. Besides, most of them were now pasted on the big sheet of brown paper.

"Let me help, Daddy! I'd love to! It's just like a puzzle picture! I was always fond of that. I'll help!"

She took up some of the torn fragments.

"This goes here," she went on, fitting it into place, "and that large one there. Then here's one, just the shape of a heart—and—why, Daddy, how odd! It has my name on it!"

"Yes, Jess! Yes—but don't bother any more. I—I guess I don't want t' put it together, anyhow. We'll go down. I see Captain Josiah headin' this way."

The keeper endeavored to take the heart-shaped piece of paper from the hand of Jess. She stood staring at it. Then, seeing a place where it would fit, she placed it there. She looked at the part of the letter already put together. She saw words that, somehow, told her what it was. There were references to the circular Matthews had sent out for her. There was the copy of the scrap of paper she had held in her tiny baby hand when Jed found her.

"Oh—oh, Daddy Jed!" cried the girl. "Where—where did you get this?"

"I—I found it," he stammered. He dared not tell her his object.

But she was not listening to him. Feverishly she was finishing out the piecing together of the fateful letter. Scrap after scrap went into the proper place. Jed stood back, afraid to think of what would follow, though he never dreamed of what it was. He thought she would only be displeased that he had kept something from her; part of her secret quest.

At last the letter was whole before her. Rapidly she read it, and, as she did, the color left her face, and she swayed unsteadily.

"What is it, Jess? What is it?" asked the lighthouse keeper hoarsely, for even he knew that something of terrible import had come to her in that torn message. "Oh, Jess, what is it?"

She read the letter from the lawyer. She read the letter to Margaret—to her mother—the shameful truth was plain to her.

"Oh!" she moaned. "Oh, my God!"

Jed sprang to catch her, for he feared she was about to fall, but, with a strong effort, she nerved herself to stand the shock.

"Jess! What is it?" he cried.

She held the letter out to him.

"Read," was all she said.

Laboriously the lighthouse keeper perused it. Slowly the sense of it came to him.

"Jess—her mother—not married—that scoundrel

—oh, Jess!” He turned to her. The awful grief of her face seemed to frighten him. He clasped her in his arms.

“It’s a lie, Jess! A lie! ’Tain’t true! It’s a lie, an’ I kin prove it! Don’t believe it, Jess gal! There’s suthin’ wrong somewhere, an’ Daddy Jed’ll git t’ th’ bottom of it! Don’t believe it, Jess! It’s a lie!”

He was fairly shouting the words now.

She put out her hands weakly.

“Help me—help me down, Daddy Jed,” she whispered. I—I want to get out doors—where—where I can hear the sea! Oh, poor mother—poor little mother!”

Blindly she groped her way to the tower stairs, Daddy Jed supporting her. His wrinkled face was working spasmodically, and he was whispering over and over again:

“It’s a lie, Jess! A lie!”

She staggered to the door. Her castle of the air had crumbled in ruins about her. Better the quest had never been undertaken.

“Poor mother—poor little mother!” she moaned. She did not think of herself.

And then, as the awfulness of her position was borne to her, she staggered forward, stretched out her hands as if in appeal, and sank back, senseless and inert, into the arms of Daddy Jed.

CHAPTER XVI

"IT IS TOO LATE, NOW!"

THE lighthouse keeper gazed in fright at the burden in his arms.

"She's dead! Jess is dead!" he faltered. "Th' terrible news has killed her!"

Staggering to a bench just outside the cottage door, he placed the girl down on it. Then he gazed helplessly at her until the sound of approaching footsteps roused him from himself. He was muttering: "She's dead! Jess is dead!" when Captain Josiah hailed him.

"What's th' matter, Jed?"

The lighthouse keeper's lips moved, but no sound came from them. Finally, however, he managed to murmur the one word:

"Dead!"

By this time the clammer had seen the girl lying white and unconscious on the bench. He started toward her, was about to put a rough hand on her cheek, when he became aware of the coating of mud and grime, caused by his digging of the clams.

"Wake up, Jed!" he exclaimed. "It's only a faint she's in! Often happens t' women folks. Here, you go in an' git some water, an' put it on her head. I can't come nigh her, I'm so covered with muck, but I'll go git Doc. Hammond. It's time fer him t' be startin' out on his rounds, anyhow. But don't git scared. Git some water, an' bathe her face with it. I'll have th' doc here in a jiffy!"

Josiah, who had abandoned his basket and hoe when he saw that something was amiss, hobbled off as fast as his old legs would let him, toward the main road, along which Dr. Hammond always passed about this time in the day.

Meanwhile Jed was ministering to Jess as best he could, and presently she opened her eyes. She was barely able to sit up when Dr. Hammond, somewhat alarmed by Josiah's incoherent account, arrived on the scene.

"Why—Jess!" exclaimed the physician. "Whatever has happened to you?"

"I—I don't know," she answered wearily. "I never was so silly as to faint before."

The doctor looked questioningly at Jed.

"She—she had a sort of shock," explained the lighthouse keeper almost vindictively, for he was determined that the terrible revelation about Jess should go no further. "She had a—a sort of shock!"

"Any injury—a fall?" asked the doctor solicitously. "Were you in the tower, Jess?"

"But I didn't fall," she answered, with a faint smile. "I will be all right—presently."

"Some water—in a glass," directed the physician, and, when Jed brought it, Dr. Ralph mixed a little aromatic spirits of ammonia, which Jess swallowed with a wry face, for she seldom took medicine.

"Now, if you can get her into the house, and have her lie down," went on Dr. Hammond, "I think she will be all right. But I'll stay a while, to make sure."

Jed was himself again, and with leaning on him, while Ralph walked by her side, Jess managed to reach the house, and was made comfortable on the old sofa. The spirits soon brought her heart into proper activity, and the color came back to her face. There was no need for other medicine, and soon Dr. Ralph took his leave, promising to look in again, when he came back from his round of calls.

"Anything more I kin do fer ye?" asked Captain Josiah, whose morning clamming had been attended by much more excitement than usual that day, beginning with the scene at the store.

"No; I'll be all right now, thank you," replied Jess. "I—I just want to rest."

For some time after the old clammer had taken

his departure, Jess and her foster father sat silent in the room. The girl closed her eyes, and Jed looked down unseeing at the rag carpet; or, now and then, let his gaze rove over the ocean. At last the sea appeared to have given up the secret it had held so long.

"Jess—Jess, ye—ye don't mind—very much—do ye?"

"Oh, Daddy Jed!" was all she could say.

"Because it don't make no manner of difference t' me," he went on, "no manner of difference, at all. Ye're my Jess, th' same as ever!—my own Jess!"

"Yes, Daddy Jed."

"An', what's more," he went on sturdily, like a storm gathering strength. "I don't no ways believe it. That lawyer feller kin easily be mistaken. I *know* he's mistaken, an' I'm goin' t' write an' tell him so."

"No—no, don't, Daddy Jed!" she begged quickly.

"Why not?" he demanded instantly.

"Because—because it would only make it worse. As it is now, very few persons know. Only you and I, and that lawyer——"

"An' that automobile feller—it was t' him that th' letter was writ. He must 'a' tore it up, an' throwed it away, an' that's how I got it."

"Oh, yes—Mr. Matthews—he—he knows. That

is why he has acted so strange—why he has stayed away. He did not want to tell me!" She sat up, her hand pressed to her rapidly beating heart.

"I can't understand it," spoke Daddy Jed simply. "I knowed no good could come of tryin' t' solve th' mystery of th' sea, an' now it's happened. I wish ye'd never let this feller have anythin' t' do with it, Jess. How ye goin' t' keep it a secret when he knows?"

"He'll never tell. Didn't he try to destroy the evidence?"

"But maybe his friend knows—they're pretty chummy."

"No, Mr. Newton doesn't know. Mr. Matthews would never tell him. I—we—the secret can be kept. Oh, Daddy Jed! Daddy Jed! My poor, broken-hearted mother!"

"I'd jest like t' have hold of that rascally captain fer about five minutes!" muttered the lighthouse keeper vindictively. "I'd show him what it means t' desert a woman! An' a baby! A woman *an'* a baby, Jess! An' you was that baby! But no! I don't believe it's true. I'm goin' t' write t' that lawyer feller an' find out more about it!"

"No, Daddy Jed. We must not. Let it be as it is. I—I should never have tried to find out about myself."

"But ye're my Jess, th' same as ever—th' same as ever," murmured the old man, as he softly stroked her hair with his rough hand.

"And we won't say anything more about it," she said, as she tried to smile. "Put the torn letter away, Daddy. I will try to forget it. Let us both forget it!"

But as she moved slowly about the cottage there was a haunting look in her eyes, and as Jed went back to the lantern, and hid away in the tin box the fateful papers, he, too, gazed out to sea, with many a shake of his gray head.

Could they ever forget?

Jess wondered why Matthews had not said something to her about the answer he had received, and then she knew the next moment why he had not. He had hoped so much from the quest—and so had she, for that matter—that he could not bring himself to break the terrible news to her.

She wondered idly whether he would want to marry her now. For several days she had not seen him. He was still in Boston with his friend, she presumed.

Dr. Ralph came back that afternoon. There was an unusually grave look on his face, and Jess noticed that he was rather pale under his coat of tan.

"Well, how are we now?" he asked, with assumed, if not real, cheerfulness.

"Oh—better," she answered in a listless voice.

"Better? That's good; but you don't act so. I have just come from Miss Byington."

"How is she?"

"Not as well as I could wish. She seems to have gone back a little. Still, I have hopes. But about you, Jess?"

He felt her pulse, with a gravely professional air, and asked her some questions about herself.

"Oh, I'm all right," she assured him. "It really was nothing."

"A shock is never nothing," he told her. "I wish—Jess," he began abruptly and stopped. Then he went on quickly. "I once asked you a question, Jess."

He noted that she had started at his words, and looked appealingly at him, as though to ask him not to proceed, but he continued, and he had gotten possession of her hand.

"I asked you a question," he went on eagerly, "and you did not answer me. You asked me to wait. I have waited—patiently, I hope. But I can wait no longer. I must ask you again. Jess, dear, I want you for my wife. I——"

She tried to stop him with a gesture, but the torrent of his words overwhelmed her.

"I want you—I must have you! I can't live without you any longer. I've waited until I am weary.

Jess, dear, won't you marry me? Let your quest go! Don't try any longer. You know how I love you—I always have—I always shall. Won't you marry me—be my wife?"

He tried to put his arm about her, but she rose, and gently pressed herself away from him. He endeavored to hold to her hand, but even that slipped down. The face of Jess was very pale.

"I—I can't marry you," she said in a low voice.

"Why not? Don't you love me?" he asked.

"Yes; yes! I—I think so."

It was a whisper, so low that he barely caught it.

"Then why can't you marry me?"

"Because, I—I love you too well to marry you—to spoil your life—your future!"

"Spoil my life—my future? Jess—what do you mean?" he demanded wildly.

"I—I can't tell you—only—only it's too late now for you to ask me to marry you."

"Too late?"

She nodded an assent.

"But, Jess—I—I can't understand."

"Oh, please don't ask me!" she moaned. "Believe me, it is too late. I—I do love you, but I—I can't marry you—it is too late! Please go—go away and leave me," and, bursting into tears, she fled to her own room, leaving a very much puzzled young doctor staring after her.

There was nothing for him to do but go, and, slowly and with many a shake of his head, he departed from the cottage.

"I can't understand it," he murmured. "She said she loved me, and yet that it was—too late!"

Suddenly, like some message coming to him by way of wireless out of the clear sky, he recalled the conversation he had heard between Matthews and Newton in the train that day, the conversation with its queer import.

"I wonder—I wonder if she could have meant that?" gasped Doctor Hammond. "Oh, my God! Is it possible? Has Matthews been anything to her? What is he to her now?"

CHAPTER XVII

JESS MAKES PLANS

WHEN Jess Blowden paid a visit to the little vine-clad cottage on the cliff a few days later, she was much surprised not to see Helen Byington somewhere about the garden, or sitting on the shady porch, as was her custom.

"Where is she?" the girl asked of Mrs. Newcomb.

"Oh, Jess!" and there was a little note of alarm in the voice. "I'm afraid she's worse. She didn't come from her room this morning, and when I went in to see if she wanted anything, she was lying with her face to the wall, and said she didn't care for any breakfast. I'm afraid she's worse."

"I'll go see," decided Jess, and when she had knocked at the chamber door, the dull, listless reply, as she was bidden enter, told her more plainly than words that something had happened.

"Why aren't you out of doors on such a beautiful morning?" called Jess half-banteringly. "I'll have to report you to Doctor Hammond for not obeying

orders. He said you were to get all the fresh air you could."

"Yes, I know—but—but I don't believe it's doing me any good," answered Helen.

She turned a listless face toward Jess. The color that, in the past two weeks, had begun to return to it, was gone. There were the same wrinkles, the look of care, the dull eyes that had marked the invalid when Jess first saw her. All the upbuilding work of the physician seemed to have gone for naught. Jess was struck by the change in the girl.

"What isn't doing you any good?" she asked brightly—"the fresh air or the doctor's treatment?"

"Neither! Oh, Jess, I'm so tired—so tired of it all. I wish they'd let me alone. I—I don't want to get well. I want to go back home!"

"You want to come out for a row with me!" insisted Jess, trying to infuse some of her own healthy spirits into the frail girl.

"No—no! Jess, thank you. I just want to lie here and—and——"

"And brood over your troubles!" interrupted the lighthouse lass. "Well, I'm not going to let you!"

She closed the door softly, though Mrs. Newcomb had gone out to the garden. Then, approaching the bed whereon Helen reclined, wrapped in a bright Indian blanket which only set off her pale face the more, Jess said:

"We can't tell when Samantha Neal will burst in on us; that's why I closed the door. But, Helen, I want to have a talk with you."

"All right, Jess, as long as you do the most of it. I don't feel able to say much."

"That won't matter. I'll talk, and you can listen, or say 'yes' or 'no,' or just 'um,' once in a while. Now to begin, do you remember the time we were talking together in the little garden arbor, and that horrid gossiping Mrs. Neal came along?"

"Yes."

"Oh, we shall get on famously this way!" exclaimed Jess, clapping her brown hands. "Now, do you remember a certain question you asked me?"

"About—about him?" the voice faltered, and Miss Byington, who had turned to partly face Jess, was again staring at the wall.

"About Mr. Matthews—yes. Do you remember?"

"Yes." The voice was scarcely above a whisper.

"You wanted to know—to know if I—loved him," faltered Jess. "I couldn't answer then because——"

"Was it because you weren't sure?" interrupted Helen sharply, with more energy than she had shown before.

"No!" cried Jess. "It was because Mrs. Neal broke in on us, and I haven't had a chance to talk

to you since. But I'm going to answer you now, and——"

There was a convulsive movement of the figure on the bed, and a muffled voice spoke.

"Well?" There was an accent of pain.

"Well, I *don't* love him!"

"Ah!"

Was it relief, surprise or wonder?

"I—I care for him very much," went on Jess, in a tone which could not be mistaken. "He has been very kind to me, and has helped me greatly in trying to trace the mystery of myself——"

"Has he succeeded?"

For an instant Jess hesitated—only for an instant.

"If he has succeeded, he has never—has never told me," she finished. It was the only thing she could say. After all, suppose Daddy Jed should be right, and it was a lie? Jess felt that she owed at least this much to herself.

"Then you don't know any more about who you are than before. Oh, Jess, dear, I'm so sorry! I hoped the mystery would be solved. But go on."

The voice was eager now, and Jess was glad, for she did not have to answer the implied question.

"I don't love Harry Matthews," she said, "though I think a great deal of him. But I didn't

come to tell you that only. I want to know about yourself. Helen, dear, I once asked you if you didn't have something to tell me. You did not speak then—perhaps you will not feel that you can now; but I would like to know—for your own sake, dear—what there is—or was—between you and Harry. Will you tell me?"

"Why do you ask?" and Helen showed her great anxiety in her face.

"Because I think, and Dr. Hammond thinks, that there is something preying on your mind, and that if you could get rid of it you would soon be well and strong again."

"Does the doctor really think that, Jess?" There was more eagerness in the voice, and Helen was again facing her visitor.

"He does, indeed. Now, suppose you come out in the boat with me? The bay is as calm as a mill pond, and the salt air will do you almost as much good as medicine. Then we can talk as we please, with no fear of being overheard by any chance visitors. Come out."

"I believe I will!"

With graceful sweeps of her oars, Jess sent the boat away from the little dock where she and Helen had embarked. The dory rose and fell on the gentle heave of the bay. Overhead the fishhawks and a few gulls circled, the latter with shrill cries, as

one of their number snatched some tidbit from the water.

Off in the main channel a great steamer was plowing along, and nearer at hand was a graceful yacht, barely moving in spite of her big spread of sail, for there was hardly a breeze.

"Now, Helen, I'm ready for confidences," spoke Jess half gayly, as she rested on her oars and let the tide carry them along. "And, believe me, dear, it is not out of idle curiosity that I ask."

"I know it, Jess, and I'll tell you all there is to tell. Oh, it's been awful to have no one to speak to about it! I never even told mamma the whole story."

Haltingly—brokenly—pausing at times when overcome by her emotions and the recollections of the past, Helen Byington told of her blighted love affair with Harry Matthews.

It was not a long story—it was a story that happens every day, yet which loses none of its pitiable-ness by repetition.

Jess listened with sympathetic glances or expressions now and then.

"And that's—that's the end," faltered Helen. "I thought never to see him again, and when you brought me ashore in your boat that day, and I saw him and Ford Newton, I—I—well, it overcame me," and she covered her face with her hands.

"You poor little girl!" exclaimed Jess. Helen was older than she, yet, somehow, Jess felt like an elder sister toward her. "You poor little girl! Oh, if I could talk to him——"

"Jess Blowden, don't you dare ever mention my name to him!" Helen's face flushed crimson with the thought.

"All right," Jess agreed easily, but there was a queer look on her face and a new light in her eyes as she rowed toward the dock.

Whether it was the confession Helen made or the little excursion on the bay that made her cheeks brighter, Jess could not tell, but certainly there was an improvement noticed in the invalid as she went back to the cottage on the cliff. Dr. Hammond noticed it that afternoon.

"It's just as if she had a tonic, the secret ingredients of which I'd give a good deal to know," he said to Jess.

"She *has* had a tonic," she told the physician, "and she's going to have more of it. You doctors aren't the only ones who can cure people."

"No—I guess that's right—Jess. We can't even cure ourselves—sometimes," and Dr. Hammond sighed. Jess sighed, too, but not until she was out of his hearing.

Never had Dr. Hammond been so absorbed in his work. Hitherto his goings and comings among his

all too few patients had been somewhat leisurely, but now he fairly rushed from house to house, driving his uncomplaining steed to the limit, to the no small astonishment of that placid animal.

"Th' doc's in a hurry these days," remarked Captain Josiah, on one occasion, when the physician had gone past Hank Stickleton's Emporium, urging his horse to a trot.

"Yes, he's workin' drefful hard," added Sam Wigglesley, who had just come off his clamming schooner. "He don't git no rest night or day, I heard said."

"Wa'al, a doctor's life ain't no bed of roses," conceded Captain Josiah; "an' fer that matter, nuther is a clammer's. But Doc Hammond didn't used t' be so rushed, an' I ain't hearn tell that he's got sich a dreffuf sight more patients; hev you?"

"No, Josiah, but then some folks can't help hustlin', ye know. Now *I* wa'nt built that way. But look at Mrs. Neal. She's allers on th' go."

"Yes, an' so's her tongue," said the captain. "But there's suthin' different about Doc Hammond of late—suthin' new," and puzzling over it, the captain took a fresh chew of fine cut, as if that would help solve the momentous problem.

And Dr. Hammond *was* working harder—trying to forget—in a rush of duties—duties that he multiplied unnecessarily.

For several days after that one excursion, Jess

took Helen out in the boat. The invalid began to improve wonderfully, and she and the lighthouse lass had several more confidential talks. At the end of one of them, when the boat touched the dock, Miss Byington walked ashore with scarcely a semblance of her formerly halting gait.

"Why!" cried Jess in delight. "You're almost cured!"

"Oh, Jess, do you believe it?"

"Look in your glass to-night," laughed Jess.

And the face that was reflected back, when Helen held up the mirror, seemed to smile at her in a way it had not done for many months.

"Oh, I—I do believe I'm going to get well!" she exclaimed, and she noticed that her hair, which had been woefully thin, was thickening luxuriantly, so that it was quite a task, as it formerly had been, to do it up for the night.

Meanwhile Dr. Hammond was regular in his calls. He kept up his nerve treatment, and laughingly said he was acquiring enough material from his first patient of this class to more than complete his book, from which he hoped so much.

Harbor Hill, in all these days, had been going on much the same as usual. The light still flashed from the tower after sundown, the old stage with the same horses kicking up the same cloud of dust, traveled back and forth from Harbor Hill to Port-

aby. S. Rufus Blodgett still continued to write his melodramas, and was preparing to have a one-act play of his presented that fall in the town "Lyceum," near Hank Stickleton's "Emporium."

Reuben Tittlemore still continued to chant his ditties whenever Hank was not within hearing. Captain Josiah still went clamming, and Mrs. Samanthy Neal talked whenever she could find any one to listen.

But she had one less in her audience, for Harry Matthews had gone permanently away from Harbor Hill. He and Newton departed in the big car one afternoon, following a visit Matthews paid to the lighthouse.

"I haven't forgotten your quest," he said to Jess; but she noticed that he avoided her eyes. "I am going to have some more circulars printed, but I think I will send them out from my office in Boston. I can handle the matter better from there. So don't give up hope."

"No—I shan't," she said gently. But she realized there was no more hope for her. She did not know whether to let Matthews know that she knew, or let him go on thinking she was ignorant that the quest had already ended so disastrously. It was better to say nothing, she thought.

As for Matthews, he too was puzzled. He could only let matters drift, trusting that the quest would

die of itself. And he would keep the silence to which he had vowed himself and Newton.

In Daddy Jed's tin box were the pasted scraps of paper that told such a pitiful story. Jed had locked them away, not knowing what else to do. Since his vehement cry that the horrible thing could not be true, he had been puzzling as to the best way to go about proving it an untruth.

After all, how could he? He was getting old. His brain was not as active as it had been. Sometimes he thought of taking the matter to Hank, and asking him his opinion, but he shrank from letting the story of Jess become known to the storekeeper, even though Daddy Jed felt it to be a lie.

"It—it might git out—Samanthy Neal might hear of it," he whispered to himself, "an' then folks would point their fingers at my Jess, an' say mean things. No, it can't be. I'll—I'll have t' wait."

So the scraps of paper remained in his box.

As for Jess, there seemed to be a strange listlessness about her of late, and it wore off only when she was with Helen Byington. The two girls seemed to have some secret between them—a secret that had brought back the color to the cheeks of the invalid. A secret that had been just the tonic she needed—the lifting of the terrible nightmare from her mind, to enable the body to properly do its work, aided by the treatment Dr. Hammond was giving her.

"I declare!" the physican exclaimed enthusiastically one day, "your folks won't know you when you go back, Miss Byington!"

"Really?" she asked, with a happy laugh. "I'd almost be glad if they didn't!"

"And some one else won't, either," whispered Jess, when the doctor had gone, for as yet neither the lighthouse lass nor Helen had hinted to him how the change had been wrought. It was a plan that Jess had evolved by herself.

But if she was capable of planning happiness for others she was singularly unfortunate in that respect as regarded herself. Day by day she seemed to grow paler and to care less for the things of life. Even her dory, in which she had been wont to spend many days on the water, offered no attractions for her, save when she took out Helen, and often, for days at a time, it rested idle on the sands.

Daddy Jed watched Jess, and shook his head.

"It's preyin' on her," he whispered. "Preyin' on her mind! Oh, I wish th' sea had took away that piece of paper she held in her little fist, when I found her on th' beach, jest like a big crab—then this wouldn't 'a' happened. It's preyin' on her—preyin' on her," and he tottered up the stairs to the lantern room, where he would sit by the hour, gazing off across the sea.

And so the days went on at Harbor Hill. Be-

tween Jess and Dr. Ralph there seemed to have sprung up a little coldness. From a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, it had gradually overspread their heaven, until their whole sky was now a leaden hue.

"Oh, if only—if only it hadn't happened!" cried Jess to herself. "If I hadn't tried to know, he and I could be happy now. But I can't let him throw himself away on me—after what I know."

Something seemed to whisper to her that she could keep her secret away from him, but her pure soul revolted from the half-formed suggestion in an instant.

"No!" she cried. "I'll never do it! Either I come to him with an honored name or not at all!"

And Dr. Ralph was none too happy, though he saw before him the completion of his great work on nervous diseases, considerable data of which was due to his new case. Some fellow practitioners to whom he had read parts of the manuscript were warm in their congratulations, and predicted a brilliant future for him.

"But it doesn't appeal to me as it did," he said to himself, as he sat in his study, going over some of his writings. "I used to count the time when Jess and I could work together. But now—now——"

He sat staring blankly at the wall.

"She—she said it was too late—too late!" he murmured. "I wonder—— Oh, my God! It can't

be true! It can't be true—and he—he has gone away!”

Once more he brooded in the silence and darkness until there came a tap on his door, and the gentle voice of Aunt Aurelia called:

“Ralph, dear, haven't you gone to bed yet? It's very late. You should be asleep.”

“Yes, auntie—I'm going at once. But—but not to sleep!” and he laughed mirthlessly, and there came a feeling over him that soon he would need some of his own nerve medicine, for he was twitching in a way he did not like.

CHAPTER XVIII

A LETTER TO MATTHEWS

MRS. SAMANTHY NEAL trudged slowly along the road that led to the lighthouse. In her hand she carried a little basket which she guarded carefully, for it contained fresh eggs. There was a grim, set look on her face and a brisk manner in her walk. She seemed bent on some definite errand, and not as though she had started out to pay one of her many sociable, gossipy visits.

"I'll git it out of Jess Blowden if anybody kin," mused Mrs. Neal, as she hurried on. "Th' very idea of sich a secret as this bein' in Harbor Hill all these days, an' me not knowin' a thing about it. I don't believe she kin keep it from *me*," and there was a grim tightening of the thin lips.

"Howdy, Jess!" called Mrs. Neal, as she paused at the open door of the pleasant sitting room of the cottage, across the rag carpet of which the sun was streaming in broad bands of light. "I jest thought I'd run over this mornin', bein' as how I hadn't much to do."

"Oh—I'm glad to see you, Mrs. Neal." This wasn't strictly true, but then—we all say it. "Come in," went on Jess, as she came forward.

"I've brought you a few fresh eggs," continued the gossip, as she passed over the basket and sat down in a rocker with an air of relief. This was the first skirmish—getting in. She half-feared Jess might be out rowing, as she had been so frequently of late.

"Fresh eggs—that's kind of you. Daddy Jed loves them for his breakfast, and, somehow, our hens haven't been laying of late."

"No, so I heard. I think 'twas Mrs. Blodgett told me—Simon's mother, you know."

"Oh, S. Rufus."

"Yes, S. Rufus!" with a loud sniff. "Th' airs of that snip, since he took t' writin' that play-stuff, is beyond belief! Simon's his name, same as 'twas his father's afore him, an' Simon he is t' me. Yes, it was his mother was sayin' as how your hens was fallin' off in their layin'. But I've got more eggs now than I know what t' do with since my boarder went away—— I s'pose ye heard that Mr. Matthews went back t' Boston?" and she looked at Jess sharply.

"Yes, I knew it." The quiet voice did not betray anything.

Mrs. Neal took another tack. She swung her

old-fashioned frigate of gossip around to bring a broadside to bear on Jess.

"He was quite a society man," she went on. "My, th' number of clean collars an' cuffs an' shirts he wore would 'a' kept one woman busy. Do you know, Jess Blowden, that man wore a clean shirt every day, an' I have knowed him t' change his collar twice between high an' low water, an' his cuffs likewise! It was suthin' terrible. He used t' send his things t' Portaby t' be done up in one of them new-fangled steam places. Enoch Berryman took 'em in on th' stage, an' brought 'em back. I should think he could 'a' had his laundry done up here."

"There isn't any place," returned Jess, for want of something better to say.

"Hu! I could have done it!"

Jess didn't answer. She wondered, with the amount of time Mrs. Neal spent at her neighbors' houses, how she ever found time to do her own housework, let alone any fine laundering.

"But that ain't th' news I come over t' tell ye," she went on, as she drew her chair nearer to that of Jess. "I come across a piece of a society paper th' other day," she resumed. "One of them papers that allers tells what this rich woman or that rich woman wore, an' who's gittin' divorced an' who's marryin' somebody else's husband! It was one of them papers."

"Yes?" Jess was trying to decide when the general engagement would open.

"Yes," went on the gossip, getting ready to unmask some more guns; "it was among Mr. Matthews' things, but I didn't think he'd want it, so I didn't send it after him. I found it some time after he left. It was an old paper, an' it wasn't all there, but there was one page that had on it a piece about him."

"About whom?"

"About who? Why, this Mr. Matthews I'm talkin' about!" Mrs. Neal seemed indignant that Jess was not paying any more attention. "It was a piece about him, an' it said as how he was engaged to a Miss Helen Byington! Now, what do you think of that? To Miss Helen Byington! Ain't that th' name of th' young woman what's boardin' t' Mrs. Newcomb's?"

"I think so—yes," answered Jess calmly.

"Well?" asked Mrs. Neal, with a sniff. She seem disappointed that Jess had not been surprised. "Do you s'pose it's true, Jess?"

"I have every reason to believe it is. In fact, I know that Mr. Matthews and Miss Byington were once engaged."

"You knowed that, Jess Blowden, an' you never told anybody!" The gossip's face was full of amazement.

"Why should I?"

"Why should you?" But words failed Mrs. Neal. Her heaviest gun had back-fired. She looked helplessly at Jess, with fallen jaw and dull eyes.

"It wasn't any of my affair," went on the light-house lass.

"Wasn't any of your affair? Why, Jess Blowden, everybody has been sayin' that Mr. Matthews was sweet on you!"

"Then the gossips have been taking an unwarranted liberty with the names of Mr. Matthews and myself!" exclaimed Jess, with energy, while a wave of color surged into her pale face.

"Oh, th' gossips have, eh?" sneered Mrs. Neal.

"Yes, and I don't care to discuss any longer something that does not concern me," went on Jess. "I'm afraid you'll have to excuse me now, I'm going for a row with Miss Byington, and I see her down on the beach. You can talk to Daddy Jed, if you like," she added sweetly. "Though he isn't very sociable when his rheumatism bothers him."

"Humph! Well, th' airs some folks gives themselves is amazin' t' me!" sniffed Mrs. Neal, as she arose to go. "But I shouldn't be s'prised but what Mrs. Newcomb would soon lose her young lady boarder."

"Why?" asked Jess, in some surprise.

"Wa'al, ain't it natural fer a girl t' go where her

sweetheart is? I reckon she'll be goin' back t' Boston now. Do you s'pose th' weddin' will be there?" Even the snub which Jess had administered could not prevent Mrs. Neal asking this question.

"I'm sure I don't know," was the answer. "I believe the engagement was broken off. One can never believe what one sees in these society papers, Mrs. Neal."

"The engagement broken off! Then that accounts fer it! I wondered why them two weren't goin' t'gether. They had a quarrel!"

"I'm afraid I can't stay any longer, Mrs. Neal," and Jess moved toward the door.

"An' I shouldn't be a bit s'prised," went on the relentless gossip, bringing her bowgun to bear, "t' hear that th' engagement was broke off on your account, Jess."

"On my account?"

"Yes. Th' way Mr. Matthews went around with you, right after that auto accident, was enough t' make any other girl break her engagement with him."

"Mrs. Neal," cried Jess, with sparkling eyes, "I don't wish to discuss this any longer! Mr. Matthews and I had certain business matters to attend to, and they have now ended. I would not speak of this, except for what you have said; but now I will tell you that the engagement between Mr. Mat-

thews and Miss Byington was broken off before Mr. Matthews came here. And another thing: I must ask you to cease your gossip concerning me and Miss Byington!"

"Cease my gossip! Why, I never, in all my born days, heard tell of such impudence, Jess Blowden!"

"Impudence or not, it must stop!" declared Jess firmly. "Good morning, Mrs. Neal," and she hurriedly left the cottage, while the indignant old woman, her face flushed with an unusual surprise, caught up the basket of eggs, determining not to leave them now, and swept out after Jess.

"I never was so insulted in all my life!" she muttered. "Me a gossip! I'll go over and see Mrs. Blodgett. Maybe she has heard more than I have, an' I kin git suthin' out of her," and with a vindictive look at Jess, who had now joined Helen, Mrs. Neal walked back the way she had come.

Jess thought so little of the talk of her recent visitor that she did not tell Helen about it. The girls had other matters to discuss, and soon, with the little dory dancing about on the choppy waves that had been kicked up by a brisk west wind, they were deep in certain confidences.

"Do you think he will come?" asked Helen, as she accepted the invitation of Jess to row a bit, for the invalid was now taking gentle exercise, and practice with the oars was one.

"I'm sure he will, after he reads the note I shall send him," was the reply.

"When?" and there was an eagerness in the girl's face and voice that had long been absent.

"Oh, I think in about two weeks. Dr. Hammond believes by then that the last of your illness will have passed away."

"Oh, I'm well now! I don't limp the least bit, and I wouldn't know I had any nerves. As for my hair and complexion and my wrinkles——"

"I'm not going to flatter you!" cried Jess, with a laugh. "Your own glass will do that. But, seriously, Helen, your improvement has been wonderful."

"And I have Dr. Hammond and you, most of all, to thank for it, Jess, dear!"

"Oh, give the most credit to the doctor."

"At least he thinks it is mostly his," went on Miss Byington. "You haven't told him yet about Harry, have you?"

"No. I'm keeping it for a surprise. Oh, I wish I could be there to see!"

"Jess Blowden, if you stay within a mile of the place, I'll——"

"Oh, don't worry. But you must tell me all about it afterward."

"I will. Oh, and yet——" she paused, and a half-frightened look came over her face.

"If what?" asked Jess.

"Supposing you were wrong, after all?"

"I'm not wrong, Helen. I know it will turn out all right."

They rowed on in silence for a while, the only sounds being the lap of the waves against the dory or the shrill scream of the gulls overhead.

"Jess, dear," spoke Helen at length.

"Yes?"

"Once I asked you if you didn't have something to tell me."

"Yes."

"You didn't tell me anything."

"Because I had nothing to tell."

"Are you sure? I fancied there was some one, who is very good looking, tall and strong, who knows such a wonderful lot about nerves, and that he might write a prescription for you some day. How about it, Jess?"

"No, dear." The voice was low.

"Aren't you—don't you——"

"There never can be anything between Dr. Hammond and me, Helen."

"Oh, why not? I'm sure he loves you!"

"He does, and—and I love him, but——"

"Oh, Jess, dear, don't let a little thing like jealousy stand between you and happiness. I'm sure his attentions to that other girl don't——"

"What other girl?" Jess looked at her companion sharply.

"Miss Florence Denmore—she's some relative of his, and I've often seen them together."

"Oh—it—it isn't that!" and there was a queer look on the face of Jess. "I wasn't thinking about her, though once——" Jess stopped abruptly.

"Can't you tell me, Jess? I wish I could help you—as you have helped me!"

"No one can help me, Helen. Please don't talk about it," and Jess took the oars, and with long sweeps of her strong, bronzed arms sent the dory bounding over the waves.

"Well," remarked Dr. Hammond to Jess, a few days later, when he had been called in to prescribe for Daddy Jed, "I am going away."

"Going away?" There was vague alarm in her voice.

"Only for a few days. I have to run up to Boston to make some arrangements about the publication of my book."

"Then it is really coming out at last?" she was eagerly joyful over his success.

"Yes, it's practically out at last. But—somehow, Jess, I'm not as happy over it now as I once thought I would be."

"Why not?" she asked before she thought.

"Because," he replied in a low voice, "I used to

count on the time when—when you and I would rejoice together over it.”

“But can’t we? I am glad—now—for your sake.”

“Yes, Jess, I—I know, but not in the way I mean.”

She turned her head away. A question seemed to tremble on his lips, but a look at her averted face did not encourage him to ask it.

“How long shall you be away?” she asked. “What will your patients do without you?”

“Oh, Dr. Fleming is going to look after the worst cases. I have left some medicine for Miss Byington, in case she feels a return of her nervous spells, but I hope she will not. I shall be in Boston a couple of days—perhaps longer.”

“Oh, I wonder if you would do something for me!” exclaimed Jess suddenly, as a thought came to her.

“Certainly, anything but matching ribbons or buying a hat. I hardly feel equal to that.”

“No, I want you to leave a note for me. I was going to mail it, and mark it ‘personal,’ but often the office boys or a secretary will open letters so addressed. I want this to reach the person directly, and so, if you will hand it to him, I shall be greatly obliged to you.”

“Certainly I’ll do it.”

"Wait, then, and I'll get it. I'm so glad I happened to think of this plan."

She hastened into her own room, while Dr. Hammond went outside, where Daddy Jed was sitting on a bench on the sunny porch of the lighthouse cottage.

"Doc," began the old man, when he had looked around and noted that Jess was not within hearing, "have ye noticed anything strange about my gal lately?"

"About Jess, you mean?"

"Yes. Ain't ye noticed suthin'?"

"Well, she doesn't seem to be quite as well as usual, but perhaps it's only the hot weather that affects her."

"No—it ain't th' weather, doc. It's——"

"Hush! Here she comes!" exclaimed Dr. Ralph.

Jess came hurrying out. The lighthouse keeper affected a sudden interest in the bay and sky.

"Now, if it won't be too much trouble, I'd like to have you deliver that personally," she said. "I fancy he'll be glad to see you again."

"He? Who is it to?" he asked.

She made a silent motion toward Daddy Jed, who was gazing aloft, and then pointed to the letter. Dr. Hammond turned it over and read the inscription. It was to Mr. Harry Matthews, and was marked "Personal."

"Oh—for him!" the physician exclaimed in a strained voice, and then, with a swift glance at Jess and a murmured good-by to Daddy Jed, Dr. Ralph turned away.

CHAPTER XIX

A GLEAM OF HOPE

S. RUFUS BLODGETT looked quickly up from a pile of manuscript over which he was at times scowling, again smiling as though well pleased at himself, and, anon, biting the end of his pencil.

"Let me see," he murmured, trying to draw inspiration from a barrel of sugar on one hand and a kit of mackerel on the other, "if I have the heroine struck by a trolley car in this act, I can have the hero disguised as the motorman——"

"Is any one here?" asked the voice of Jess Blowden, as she came from the bright outdoors into the dark interior of the store, and looked in vain for one of the clerks.

"Yes, I'm here, Miss Jess," answered S. Rufus quickly, rising up from behind a towering pile of herring in glass-fronted boxes. "I was wooing the tragic muse, and I'm afraid I didn't hear you enter."

"I couldn't see any one at first," explained Jess, "it was so dark."

"I'm glad you came in," went on S. Rufus, gathering up his pile of papers, and advancing toward Jess with what he meant to be a patronizing smile. "I have an idea for the new act in my great play, and I'd like to tell you about it."

"My goodness, S. Rufus!" exclaimed Jess, trying not to smile, "how many acts are there to be in your drama?"

"Well, I had arranged for fourteen, but when I wrote to a theatrical manager the other day, telling him my plans, and saying I would forward him the play when finished, he said he couldn't think of considering fourteen acts. So now I have to cut it down to four, and it's hard work. But I think I have a great idea. I'll read you——"

There was a step on the store porch, and S. Rufus hastily thrust his manuscript under the counter. Then, as he saw who the newcomer was, there came a look of relief to his face.

"Oh, it's only Reuben Tittlemore," he said. "I'll just run over this, Jess, and——"

"Oh, how d' do, Miss Jess!" exclaimed Reuben. "Beautiful weather we're having, isn't it, though a trifle warm. However, I find that I can sing better in warm weather. It seems to have soothing effect on the vocal chords."

"Mr. Stickleton left word you were to straighten out your piles of calicoes!" said S. Rufus sharply.

"Oh, he did, eh?" exclaimed Reuben. "I s'pose I'll be working while you're puttering over that silly play of yours. I'll tell Mr. Stickleton when he comes in, too. I see the papers you're trying to shove under the counter. I missed you at church last Sunday, Jess," went on the impressionist tenor. "I had a lovely solo all to myself, too. I wish you could have heard it."

Jess murmured something inaudible, which may or may not have been a compliment.

"Ahem! I was talking to Miss Blowden, if you'll excuse me!" broke in S. Rufus. "If you'll just step over here, Jess, where we will not be interrupted while Reuben is arranging his side of the store, I'll read you——"

"Here comes Mr. Stickleton!" called the other clerk suddenly, and S. Rufus made such haste to get rid of his manuscript that the pages scattered over the floor, and the melodramatic clerk tried to look as if he was hunting for something on the top-most shelf.

"Oh, no, he isn't, either! I made a mistake," went on Reuben, chuckling. "It's Captain Josiah, and Mrs. Neal is with him. She's talking him deaf, dumb and blind."

S. Rufus Blodgett cast a look of scorn and hate at his enemy and picked up his scattered papers.

"What can I do for you to-day, Jess?" he asked,

like a man in whom ambition is crushed past all hope of resurrection.

"I just want some butter, S. Rufus," and while the clerk was dejectedly digging it out of a tub in the ice chest, Jess spoke to the captain and Mrs. Neal, who now entered the store. Mrs. Neal seemed rather cold in her greeting, but the captain was as hearty as usual.

"Howdy, Jess!" he exclaimed. "How's Daddy Jed?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And you? But then, I kin see you're well, though it seems t' me ye ain't quite so peart as you was this spring."

"No—it's—it's the hot summer, I guess. Are you getting any clams these days, Josiah?"

"Oh, a few. Hain't had any new-laid eggs up t' th' lighthouse lately, have ye?" he asked, and he grinned suggestively at Mrs. Neal. For the story of her visit and the manner in which she had flounced away when defeated in her gossiping battle, taking her eggs with her, had somehow leaked out. Probably she herself unconsciously spread it.

"No—our chickens aren't laying well," answered Jess, trying not to smile.

"Humph! Ef some folks would mind their own business an' let other folks alone, Harbor Hill would be a bigger place!" sniffed Mrs. Neal.

"That's right!" exclaimed Captain Josiah eagerly. "That's right, by gum! Wa'al, Hank's out, I see. I reckon as how you two fellers has been havin' th' times of your lives, too: one singin' an' th' other readin' play-actin'!" went on the old seafaring man. "But ef it's all th' same t' you, Reuben, I'll have a paper of extra fine cut chewin' terbacker. I'm sort of needin' a little chaw. Me an' Mrs. Neal done considerable talkin' on our way over, an' my mouth's kinder dry."

The captain chuckled hoarsely.

"Speak fer yerself!" snapped the gossip. "I want a yard an' a quarter of black cambric, Reuben," and with her head held high, Mrs. Neal swept past Jess.

The latter, taking her pound of butter, which S. Rufus had handed to her with the air of a prince bestowing a royal crown upon some princess, passed out of the store.

"Some folks gives themselves mighty high airs!" murmured Mrs. Neal, as she critically felt of the cambric which Reuben laid out for her, after having served Captain Josiah with the tobacco.

It was three days since Dr. Hammond had gone to Boston to arrange about his book, and also deliver the note Jess had given him. He had expected to be back the second day, but for some reason he lingered, and Jess was a little anxious.

For a visit paid to Helen at the cliff cottage had

disclosed the fact that the girl had suffered a slight relapse of her nervous trouble, and the medicine which the doctor had left did not seem to be having the expected effect.

"But he'll soon be back," Jess had said. "If he doesn't, I'll telegraph to him. We can't let all his good work be undone."

"Have you his address?"

"No, but I can get it from Aunt Aurelia."

"Oh, I don't imagine I shall need him," said Helen. "I hope I shall be all right in a few days."

"I'm sure you will when I get an answer to my letter," spoke Jess brightly.

"Oh, Jess—suppose he doesn't come?"

"Oh, he'll come, Helen," the lighthouse lass had said.

So that is why, as she came from the Harbor Hill "Emporium" that afternoon, she looked anxiously along the road to Portaby, for a sight of the stage, on which the doctor would be if he arrived on the regular train.

As Jess was going along she heard carriage wheels behind her, and, turning, she saw the doctor's rig. In it was Miss Florence Denmore, looking quite charming in a pink and white lawn, with a lingerie hat to match.

"Oh, how do you do, Miss Blowden!" graciously

called the girl in the carriage. "Won't you get in and ride?"

"No—thank you," answered Jess, a little shortly; and then, with a change of manner, she added: "I am only going as far as the lighthouse, and it's but a step more. Won't you come in?"

"Oh, no, I'm going to drive over to Portaby for Dr. Ralph. He telegraphed that he was coming on the afternoon train, and he doesn't want to wait for the stage, which is so slow. So I'm going to drive him home."

"Oh," answered Jess. She hesitated a moment, and then went on, a bit awkwardly: "Would you mind asking him, in case he has any message for me, to stop at the cottage on his way home? It won't take but a minute."

"Of course I'll ask him. Wouldn't you like to ride over to the station with me? There is room for three in this carriage."

"No—thank you," answered Jess, with something of her former manner, and then Miss Denmore drove on.

Dr. Hammond looked very tired when he stepped off the train that warm afternoon. There was a little stoop to his shoulders, and his eyes had lost much of their brightness.

"Oh, this is indeed a pleasure!" he exclaimed,

when he saw Miss Denmore's smiling face, and appreciated that she had driven over to meet him. "I thought, when Aunt Aurelia got my telegram, that perhaps she would hire little Tad Evert to come over for me. He does sometimes. But I'm glad it's you!" The words were cordial, but the girl felt a lack of sincerity in his manner.

"I wanted to come," answered Miss Denmore. "Oh, before I forget it, I have a message for you. Miss Blowden wants you to stop if you have any answer for her."

"Yes, I have. I'll stop," and then he moved wearily toward the carriage. The drive from Portaby was rather silent, though Miss Denmore earnestly tried to make talk.

"Is your book coming on all right?" she asked.

"Oh, yes—the publishers have great hopes of it." His tone was indifferent.

"And you?"

"Oh, well, I suppose I am satisfied. Half the pleasure of a thing is in the anticipation, you know, and that's gone now."

"But you have still to see your work in print."

"Yes, I know, but——" He gazed down the dusty road.

Once more the talk lagged until they were in sight of the lighthouse. The doctor was strangely neglect-

ful of her, his companion thought, with rather a feeling of pique.

"There's Miss Blowden, outside—waiting for you," spoke Miss Denmore. "She must be quite anxious."

"Yes—I—I believe she is."

The carriage stopped beside Jess, who nodded a welcome to the physician.

"We're glad to have you back in Harbor Hill!" she said brightly.

"And I think I'm glad to get back. Is Daddy Jed well?"

"About as usual." She looked a question at him.

"I delivered your letter," he said gravely, "and the message is that—he will come."

"Is that all?"

"Yes. He told me simply to tell you that he would come. He said you would understand why he did not write."

"Yes!" exclaimed Jess, but there was a brighter look on her face than there had been, and, seeing it, Dr. Hammond appeared more tired and dispirited than before.

"Good-by!" he called as he drove off, and Jess went back into the cottage with a light step and shining eyes.

The threatened relapse of Helen Byington did

not develop. Dr. Hammond gave her some new medicine, and in a few days his patient was better than ever. There was a curious air of expectancy about her, a happier look on her face, and she and Jess, who were much together, could be heard laughing in the vine-covered arbor.

"I declare! I never see such a change in a person in all my born days," said Mrs. Newcomb to herself. "But if that Miss Byington is looking better, Jess seems to be running down. I should think *she'd* take a tonic."

And Jess, as the days went by and she grew more and more listless, while her eyes dulled, began to think herself that something was wrong. Daddy Jed saw it, too.

"Jess, gal," he said kindly, "can't ye stop broodin' over it—over that lawyer's letter?"

"I—I'm not brooding, Daddy, dear. I think of it, of course, for I can't help it. I wish it could have been different, not so much for my sake as for dear little mother," and she looked up toward the grave on the hilltop, on which she had planted some fresh flowers.

"Wa'al, I've about made up my mind," went on the aged keeper. "I've about made up my mind, Jess."

"What about?" she asked.

"I'm goin' t' consult Hank about this. I'll show

him th' papers, an' he'll know what t' do t' go about t' disprove 'em. Hank once studied t' be a lawyer, but he didn't git very fur. Howsomever, he'll know how t' tackle this, I reckon. I'll take th' papers t' him, same as I did th' one ye held in yer fist when I picked ye up on th' beach, jest like ye were a big red crab—a big red crab," and he spoke musingly.

"No, Daddy Jed, you mustn't!"

"Mustn't what?"

"Show Hank those papers! The secret is for me—for you—and—that's enough."

"But, Jess, don't ye want t' disprove it?"

"Oh, if we only could, Daddy!" and she threw her arms about his neck.

"Ye kin, I tell ye, Jess. I'll see Hank right away——"

"No! No, you must not. Wait—wait a while, Daddy. Just wait a little longer."

He did not want to, but she persuaded him, and several more days passed. In them Jess grew more and more unlike herself. Jed wanted her to see Dr. Hammond, but she insisted that it was only the effects of the warm weather, and would soon wear off.

It did not, however, and finally, when Jess had gone to the village one afternoon and Dr. Hammond happened to be passing, Jed, with sudden de-

termination, called to him from the bench where he was sitting in the shade of the cottage.

"Rheumatism again, Daddy?" asked the physician.

"No, I didn't call ye in fer myself, doc, not this time. It's Jess I want t' see ye about."

"Jess! Is she ill?"

"Wa'al, she is an' she ain't. Have ye noticed her lately, doc?"

"Yes, she hasn't been looking as well as usual."

"That's right, doc, though she says she is. But I know. Doc, I want t' ast ye a question. Sometimes when a pusson gits a shock t' their mind—I mean a big disapp'intment like—don't that make 'em ill, frequent?"

"It often does. But has Jess——"

"Now, doc, I'm comin' t' it. I've been a good while makin' up my mind. Fust I were goin' t' call in Hank Stickleton, an' see what he said."

"Is Hank practicing medicine now?" asked Dr. Ralph, with just the suspicion of a smile.

"No, I didn't calculate Jess exactly needed medicine. It's advice she wants. Doc, you wait here a minute. I'll be back."

Moving as quickly as his rheumatic legs would allow him, the old lighthouse keeper climbed to the lantern room, and came back presently with a tin box. Dr. Hammond had been wondering what was

to come. He had noticed with growing alarm the change in Jess, but he attributed it to a different cause.

"Ye know th' story of my Jess as well as I do," went on Jed, as he fumbled with the lock of the box, as it rested on his knees, "so I won't go inter that. But not long ago she got th' notion that she could find out who she really was."

"Yes," spoke the physician softly, as Jed paused.

"Yes, an' she got that automobile feller t' help her. Wa'al, I stumbled on it by accident, an' I tried t' stop her, but ye know what women be, doc!"

There was a nod for an answer.

"Wa'al, Jess sent out a lot of letters, with this feller's help, an' fer a time it didn't look like it would amount t' anything."

"I understood that it did not," broke in the doctor.

"It did, though, an' I wish t' God it hadn't!" burst out Jed desperately. "Look at that!" and he held out to the physician the pasted papers, rapidly telling how he had come by them, and how the sudden revelation had caused Jess to faint that day.

Dr. Hammond seemed to take in the import of the documents at a glance. His face paled, and he muttered something below his breath. Jed watched him anxiously.

"Ef there was only some way t' prove that a lie

—an' I believe before th' Lord that it *is* a lie—I'd be willin' t' lay down my life right now—fer Jess!" said the old man simply. "Lay down my life, willin'! here an' now, ef I could bring th' roses an' the smile back t' th' face of my little Jess! Jess, what I picked up on th' beach like she were a big red crab—a big—red crab! I'd lay down my life, willin'."

He wiped his eyes with the back of his hard, wrinkled hand. Dr. Hammond was not looking at him. His gaze had traveled to the end of the pasted scraps of paper. He saw the signature—Max Steger.

"Max Steger—Max Steger!" he murmured.

"If we could only prove it a lie!" Daddy Jed was repeating; "only prove it a lie! I'd——"

"Daddy, I think we can!" cried the doctor suddenly. "I think we can!"

"Oh, Lord!" murmured the lighthouse keeper, as if it was the beginning of a prayer.

"Listen!" went on Dr. Hammond suddenly. "I know this Max Steger. I'd know his signature anywhere. He once forged my name to a promissory note. He's a scoundrel if ever there was one. His father was never a lawyer—he was a crafty politician, and Max followed in his footsteps. Max was in my class at college. He was expelled for cheating in his examinations. If he has worked up this case against Jess, I *know* it's a lie!"

"Thank God!" whispered Jed. It was another prayer.

"There's been some crooked work here!" cried Dr. Hammond. "I always had my suspicions of that Matthews, and this makes me sure of it! He tried to blacken the character of our Jess for his own ends! I can't understand it all, but I know that this Max Steger is a scoundrel, who would do anything for money. He's been hired to manufacture this evidence. It wouldn't be hard to do for a rascal of his attainments.

"Daddy Jed, I'm going to take this paper! I'm going to find this man and make him acknowledge the truth! At least, if I can't prove who Jess is, I can prove that this is a lie!"

"Oh, thank the dear Lord! I knowed it couldn't be true—I knowed it! My Jess—Jess what I picked up off th' beach like she were a big red crab—I knowed it couldn't be true!" and the tears were falling down the furrowed cheeks and dropping on the withered hands. "I knowed it was a lie!"

"It is, and I'll prove it!" almost shouted Dr. Hammond. "So this is what's been eating out the heart of Jess! Oh, when I get hold of that scoundrel!" he exulted, clasping his strong hands. "I'll get right at this, Daddy. I'll drop everything and get right at it!" and folding up the pasted scraps of paper, Dr. Hammond hurried out to his carriage.

"Don't say anything to Jess about it," he cautioned the lighthouse keeper, turning back for a moment.

"Nope—I won't, doc!"

There was new life in the tones. Dr. Hammond, with his mind in a whirl over the revelation that had so unexpectedly been made to him, drove rapidly onward.

"The scoundrels!" he murmured. "That fellow Matthews did this to make Jess feel ashamed of her origin. And then perhaps he hoped to——"

He paused, as a terrible thought came to him.

"And she has sent for him to come to her, and he is coming!" he exclaimed, while the hope that had brightened his face faded away, leaving it as careworn as before, and the old horse, feeling the slackened reins, settled into a slow walk.

"That is what she meant when she said it was too late—too late!" murmured Dr. Hammond. "That is what she meant—— God help her!"

CHAPTER XX

MATTHEWS COMES

DR. HAMMOND sat up quite late in his office that night. Twice Aunt Aurelia knocked on his door and entreated him to go to bed.

"Yes—right away," he had said each time; but when, a little later, she tiptoed her way to his study, she saw the crack of light under the portal.

"Oh, Ralph, dear," she begged. "You won't be able to work to-morrow."

"Never mind, auntie. I'm soon going to take a holiday, and I have to work late to-night to get ready for it," and he laughed, but there was little joyousness in it.

The physician mapped out a course of procedure. He went carefully over the bits of torn documents which Jess and Daddy Jed had pasted on the brown paper. He read and reread them—the letter said to have been left by the English captain and the communication from Max Steger.

"It would have been easy to make this up with what they had to go by," he murmured. "Any one

could write the first part of the Carews letter, to make the final words on the torn part come out as they do. And, from what I know of Steger, he is capable of it.

"But I wonder how he came to be out in Indiana? Boston is his stamping ground. Unless—— By Jove! that's what the scoundrels have done! They've made up the whole thing in Boston, and sent it out to this place in Indiana to be remailed. That was easy. Now what's the first thing to do?

"Obviously to see Steger and prove that he did this. If he can't produce the original documents from among the papers of his 'lawyer father,' he's done for. I must locate him first, and, while I'm at it, I will find out if by any possible chance there is another Max Steger, a lawyer, in Cressville, Indiana.

"To think Matthews would do this! And as for his object—the scoundrell! And this is what has been worrying Jess. Yet why does she send for Matthews? That's what I can't understand. And he is so ready to come. Oh, I wonder—I wonder if I ought to go on? Jess said it was too late—perhaps it is."

He sat brooding over the papers. Then his promise to Daddy Jed recurred to him.

"I'll go on with it!" he finally exclaimed, with a

sigh. "Even if it is too late. Oh, if—if things were only different!"

Then he wrote several letters, wrote until his brain was tired, and he tumbled into bed to sleep the sleep of exhaustion.

Dr. Hammond did not at once take the vacation of which he had spoken to Aunt Aurelia. He was busy among his patients, paying an occasional visit to Miss Byington. He saw little of Jess in the next few days, and did not go to the lighthouse, for fear Daddy Jed would ask him leading questions before his foster child.

"I don't want to raise false hopes," the doctor said to himself.

He watched the mails anxiously, and when a certain letter came from the clerk of the courthouse in an Indiana county seat, he tore it open feverishly.

"Just what I thought!" he exulted. "No such lawyer as Max Steger in Cressville, or, as far as the clerk knows, in all of Indiana. I think I have my man. He's in Boston, probably at some more of his crooked work, if any one will pay him.

"Now I'm off there," and Dr. Hammond hurried to his home to pack his grip. "Going on my vacation!" he told Aunt Aurelia and Miss Denmore. "I think I deserve one."

"You certainly do!" agreed the young lady. "You

have been very faithful to Harbor Hill's population."

"If only there was more of them," he said, with a queer little smile. "But never mind, when my book comes out I think I can count on a larger practice."

He seemed rather joyous. Some of his former listless manner was gone, and Florence Denmore, noticing it, wondered at the change in him. She wondered, with a little blush, whether she had had anything to do with it, for she was beginning to feel rather a new kind of regard for the good-looking doctor.

"When will you be back?" she asked. "I'll come to meet you if you let me know."

"That's good of you. I'll send a wire, perhaps." But the home-coming of the doctor was destined to be very different from what he expected.

He caught the early morning train for Boston, Miss Denmore driving him over to the station before the stage was ready to leave.

"There's no one up at the lighthouse yet," remarked the girl, for there was no sign of life in it.

"No, Jed sometimes goes to sleep after he puts out the light, and Jess doesn't stir around much, for fear of awakening him."

"She is quite an interesting character," observed Miss Denmore. "I can't exactly understand her."

"Um!" murmured the doctor. He was beginning to think that he himself couldn't understand Jess. And the one thing that puzzled him more than another, in connection with what had recently been made known to him, was why she wanted Harry Matthews to come out to Harbor Hill again, after what had happened.

The doctor shook his head over the problem, and flicked the slow-going horse lightly several times with the whip.

"Now, don't forget to wire, and I'll meet you," said Miss Denmore again, as she waved a good-by to him when the train was coming in.

"I'll remember," he told her, and then he was whirled off on his strange mission. How would it result? Even he dared not prophesy.

"But I rather guess Matthews and Steger will be surprised when I place my proofs before them," he murmured.

When Dr. Hammond was being rapidly taken toward Boston, to interview, among others, this same Steger and Matthews, the latter and his friend Newton were in earnest conversation in the rooms of the former.

"And so you're going down again, eh?" remarked Newton.

"Yes, Jess asked me to call, and—well, I didn't need that to make me come. I've been wanting to

go this long time, but, somehow, I couldn't get up the courage."

"Do you think she's changed her mind about marrying you?"

"I only hope she has!" and Matthews flashed a look at his friend.

"You can't be serious! Don't go down there. Come on, we'll have a jolly time touring in my new car."

"No, I'm going to Harbor Hill. I promised Jess I'd come, though why she wants to see me, I don't know."

"Do you suppose she's found out something about that paper?"

"No, she couldn't. I tore it up and threw it away. It's at the bottom of the sea now. The tide carried it out long ago."

An hour later Harry Matthews was on his way to Portaby, and he reached that little town in time to catch the evening stage to Harbor Hill.

"Wa'al, glad t' see ye back!" exclaimed Enoch Berryman heartily, as he tossed the mail bag up on his high seat. "Ye don't find much change in Harbor Hill."

"No, I suppose not," conceded Matthews.

"S. Rufus is still a-writin' plays, an' Reuben Tittlemore is warblin' his ditties whenever he kin git any

one t' listen," went on the stage driver, with a laugh.

Matthews rode on into the village, and arranged to stay a few days with Mrs. Hank Stickleton. That evening, after supper, he strolled over to the lighthouse. There was a beautiful moon, and, as he paused for a moment to look across the waves, which seemed turned to silver under the bright beams, he heard a step on the sands. The next moment he was confronted by Jess Blowden.

"Well, Jess," he said softly, "I have come!"

"I'm so glad!" she exclaimed. "I was afraid, after all, that you might not," and she held out her hand to him, while he grasped it eagerly.

CHAPTER XXI

"I WILL TELL YOU TO-NIGHT."

"It's almost like old times, isn't it, Jess?" asked Matthews, when, on the next day, he and the light-house lass were out in the little dory, which danced over the choppy waves, for there was a quartering wind across the bay, the forerunner of a storm. "Almost like old times, when I was helpless with my broken leg, and you used to talk to me. I—I've a good notion to get in the way of the stage some night, and take chances of another fractured limb."

"Why?"

"Oh, so you would talk to me again."

"Oh, Mr. Matthews, you don't have to go to such extreme measures. I'll talk as much as you like."

"Go ahead, then," and he smiled quizzically at her.

"What shall I say? Oh, to begin with, it wouldn't do you any good to lie down in front of the stage. It goes so slowly that Enoch would see you in time and get off to pick you up. The only way is an auto, I think."

"They're not common enough in Harbor Hill."

"No, not since your friend, Mr. Newton, went away. I don't believe two cars have been here in the meanwhile. I thought perhaps he would come down with you."

"I asked him, but he had other plans. By the way, I hardly know why *I* came—except that you wanted to see me. I'd go anywhere for that," and he glanced at her with a warm look in his eyes.

"Thanks!" She laughed out the word, and went on quickly: "I suppose you *are* wondering why I asked you to come down to this out-of-the-way place."

"I can guess," he replied, and there was a growing nervousness in his manner. "It's about the quest. Well, I must confess I——"

She stopped him with a gesture.

"Don't talk about that now," she said in a low voice. "I—I have about given up," and her tone was one of dull hopelessness. "I am almost sorry we ever undertook it, for it must have been a great deal for you to do."

"I would do more than that, Jess, if only——"

He stopped abruptly, and the memory of how the quest had ended suddenly confronted him. Did Jess surmise? Dare he tell her?

She swung the boat around so that her own face would be in the shadow, while the sun streamed into

the countenance of her companion. She did not want him to see the emotions that played over her features.

"You did not find Harbor Hill much changed?" she queried rather absently.

"Not at all. I saw the same ham hanging in Hank's store window that was there this spring."

"And you would have found S. Rufus working on his same play," she added, with a little laugh. "Didn't he try to read extracts from it to you?"

"I dodged him. Look out, Jess, there's a motor boat headed this way."

She pulled on her left oar and sent the dory to one side with a single sweep of her arm, from which the loose sleeve fell back, revealing the beautifully bronzed and rounded curves of its fullness. Matthews felt an almost uncontrollable desire to clasp his hands around it. Jess felt his burning eyes on her face.

"Poor S. Rufus!" she exclaimed, hardly knowing how to turn the conversation now. She almost regretted that she had acceded to Matthews' request to go rowing. She had asked him to come to Harbor Hill for a certain purpose, and she needed yet a little time ere her plans would be completed.

"Oh, Jess! I don't want to talk about S. Rufus, and that other idiot at the store!" he exclaimed. "I want to talk about you!"

He moved to the seat in front of her, and tried to take her hands, that were clasped on the oars.

"No—no!" she said in a low voice. "You must not."

"Jess!" he murmured, "I've got to speak! I've got to tell you again that—I love you! Listen, dear. I can guess why you sent for me!"

"You can?" There was almost fright in her eyes.

"Yes. It was because you found you could not——" he faltered. "Because you—because you had changed your mind! You remember the question I asked you—some time ago—I asked you to be my wife. You said you could not—you gave me no good reason. I have been waiting and hoping—once more I ask you—Jess! won't you marry me?"

He had her hands now. She had stopped rowing, and they were drifting with the tide. Gently she disengaged her fingers from his clasp and looked him full in the face, but it was not such a look as a girl gives her lover. There was the light of a firm purpose and resolve in the face of Jess Blowden.

"Harry," she said, "I do not think you can guess why I sent for you."

For one wild moment it came to him that she did know—that she had guessed what was in the papers which he had destroyed—that somehow she knew of her parentage—knew of the fateful ending of the quest.

"Was it because——" he began.

"Don't try," she said gently. "I will tell you presently. Now I want to speak plainly to you, and as one friend to another. I think we *can* be friends, even though you are a man—and rich—and I am a girl—and poor."

"Jess, dear, can't we be *more* than friends? Won't you let me love you? You can't stop that, anyhow, for I love you now—I always have, from the moment I first saw you. Won't you give me just a chance? You might learn to love me in time. Won't you be my wife?"

He did not stop to recall the sneering words of Newton. He did not stop to consider who Jess was. Now he imagined she was his world's desire, the one person to make him happy.

Once more Jess halted his torrent of words with a gentle gesture. He had tried to clasp her hands again, but she was rowing onward slowly.

"Harry," she said, "I can't marry you, and you know why."

He started, but she did not give him time to speak.

"I am not the woman for you," she went on. "You think you would be happy with me, but it would only be for a little while. You are a man of the world. You think you love me because I am strong and healthy. It is my physical self that you think you care for. We are not mentally suited to

each other, though I shall never forget your kindness to me."

Once more he wondered if she knew how it had ended—what a heritage it had brought her! But he did not speak, and she went on:

"I could not love you—in the way you mean," she said softly, stopping her rowing. "I could not marry you."

"Is there—is there some one else, Jess?"

"Yes," she almost whispered.

He looked at her sharply. Her face was calm—as calm as the sea before a storm.

"And there is some one else for you," she resumed softly.

"Some one else for me?"

"I mean Miss Byington, Harry. Oh, I have known it for some time," she exclaimed, as he started. "Most unexpectedly we met, and gradually I came to know her story. I know why your engagement was broken off!"

"And do you blame me, as every one does—as she does?"

"She doesn't blame you, Harry! Never think that. Though it did nearly break her heart, she knew that you thought it for the best. When she lost her health—became almost a cripple—it would have taken more courage than most men possess to have gone on."

"I—I suppose I was a cad to break with her, and yet——" He flung out his arms. Every drop of healthy, vitalized blood in his body cried out for another that was in perfect attune. He thought of Helen as she had once been, a laughing, healthy girl, and he remembered how she had suddenly grown old when the blight fell upon her. Yet even though she had released him, somehow he felt small and mean as the lighthouse lass looked at him.

"She doesn't blame you, Harry—neither do I," went on Jess. "I wanted to tell you that. So did Helen—it is a message she gave me for you. She wanted you to be happy."

"Happy! Is she happy?"

Jess did not answer. For a time she rowed on in silence.

"You did love her, didn't you, Harry?" she asked presently.

"Yes—very much, but——"

"And you love her still. Yes, you do—it is only because she has changed physically that you think you prefer me to her. But it is her mind that you must love. What does it matter whether one has dimples or wrinkles, as long as love is there? There is a difference between love and—passion." She spoke softly.

"Oh, what is the use?" he cried, with an impatient gesture. "I—— Oh, Jess, why torture me?"

"I'm not torturing you, Harry. I want you to see things as they are. I can never marry you—there are many reasons, but the chief is that there is some one else for you, and you are for some one else."

"And you sent for me only to tell me that?"

"No, Harry, not that—only."

She had swung the boat around, and it was now headed for the lighthouse.

"Then why did you want me to come here?" he asked.

"I will tell you to-night," was her reply. "If you will walk over to the cottage this evening, I—I will be on the sands, by the Black Rocks. Then you will know, Harry, why I sent for you."

"On the sands—by the Black Rocks?" He wondered if she remembered what had once taken place there—when he, in hiding, had overheard Dr. Hammond ask her to be his wife. Why had she selected that trysting place?

"Can't you tell me now?" he asked.

"No," she said gently. "I'll tell you to-night."

"And—Jess—is—is there any hope for me?" he spoke brokenly.

"Not in the way you mean," and she gazed frankly at him, while his troubled eyes looked over the waste of water to where the Black Rocks made a break in the stretch of white sands.

What would he hear there when night came?

CHAPTER XXII

THE CONFESSION

DR. RALPH HAMMOND had little difficulty in locating Max Steger in Boston. That was the easiest part of his task. What now puzzled him was how to go about it to force a confession from the scoundrel, for that there had been dastardly work in arranging to deceive Jess as to her parentage, the physician did not doubt.

"But what I can't understand," he said to Horace Wilkinson, an attorney acquaintance whom he consulted; "what I can't understand is why, after working up these fake proofs, Matthews did not show them to Jess. Her foster father only came upon them by accident."

"It is rather curious," admitted Wilkinson. "Perhaps he weakened at the last moment. He may be better than you think he is."

"No, I don't believe he is. He had his own purpose in planning to make Jess believe she was a nobody, but he did not carry it out. That's what

puzzles me. But when I stop to think that she sent him a letter by me recently, and that he promised to go to Harbor Hill—— I—God! it fairly makes me frantic! He may be there now—with her!”

“Now, don’t get excited,” counseled his legal adviser. “We can’t accomplish anything this way. We must get the proofs that Steger practically forged those documents, and then we can confront Matthews with them.”

“But how can we get at Steger?”

“Oh, I fancy I know a way. I dabbled a bit in politics this last election, and I found out some things that I have kept quiet about. I fancy Steger might be glad to make a confession in return for certain things I tell him, and agree to keep quiet about. Come, there is nothing like taking the bull by the horns, and, as there are two of us, we may be able to get a tail-hold also. We’ll go see Steger.”

They found the politician in his headquarters—some rooms over a café—where an association, of which he was the standard-bearer, held meetings.

“Hello, Wilkinson!” greeted Steger, with easy familiarity, as the lawyer entered. “What brings you here?”

“A friend of mine has something to say to you—and something to show you,” and with that Wilkinson stepped to one side, revealing Dr. Hammond, who was behind him.

"Hammond! Good God! You here? What's up? I haven't seen you since——"

"Since you forged my name!" interrupted the physician dryly. "I thought perhaps you'd forget it, Steger."

"And you've come to make trouble about that, after all these years?"

"No, not about that. I told you at the time that, if you didn't cross my path again, I'd let bygones be bygones."

"Well, I've kept my promise, Hammond. I haven't bothered you, have I?" There was a whine in the politician's voice. "I've kept away!"

"Yes, to a degree; but, like the snake you are, you've been crawling around, trying to sting some one—some one I—a friend of mine!" stammered the doctor, overcome for the moment by the stress of his emotion.

"Why, I haven't been near your place—— Let's see, it's somewhere down on the coast, ain't it?" asked Steger. "I've kept away."

"You've even been in Cressville, Indiana; haven't you?" asked Wilkinson suddenly.

"Cressville, Indiana—no! How did you hear? Of course I haven't been there!" he stammered.

"Nor even had anything mailed from there?" went on the lawyer. "Show him what you have, Hammond."

"There, you scoundrel!" cried the physician, flinging down in front of Steger the pasted scraps of paper. "There's your work! How much did Harry Matthews pay you for forging that?"

It was characteristic of Steger that when, as he expressed it, he was "caught with the goods," he grinned philosophically, if not cheerfully, admitted the guilt, and asked calmly: "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

Heretofore he had been in positions where he could afford to ask that question. He could not do this now, but, nevertheless, he followed some of his usual tactics.

"I suppose there's no use denying that I did that," he admitted, "and I see what a fool I was to sign my name. Any old name would have done, and fooled the girl just as well. I never thought I'd hear from it again, and I got well paid for it. We thought when she saw this it would end it all and there wouldn't be any come-back. But I see we were wrong."

"Then you acknowledge that this is all a lie?" demanded the doctor hotly.

"Every bit; I made it all up. It was easy enough, with what I had, though it did take me some time to fix up a letter from the English captain, so that the words would come just right to jibe with the torn-off part. But I did it."

"Then you don't know anything about the parentage of Jess Blowden?" The doctor was towering over the shrinking figure of the politician, though there was a certain air of bravado about the latter.

"Not a thing, Hammond." Steger was cringing now. The advent of two of his foes had been too much for him.

"And you never were in Cressville, Indiana?"

"Never near the place. I had a friend there, who remailed the letters for me. They were to be sent some place on the coast—Anchor Hill, I believe it was."

"Harbor Hill," corrected the doctor quietly. "And you did this for pay—tried to spoil a girl's life for money!"

"Oh, come now, that's putting it a little too strong, Hammond, my dear chap——"

"Don't 'dear chap' me, you little beast!" snapped the doctor.

"Well, all right, only you're going a bit heavy on me, 'pon my word you are. I had no intention of ruining any girl's life. It was done with the best intentions, I was told."

"With the best of intentions!" cried Dr. Hammond. "How did Harry Matthews ever make that plain to you?"

"Harry Matthews? I didn't do this for him." Steger gazed wonderingly at his two visitors.

"Not for him? Do you mean to tell me that he didn't pay you to forge these documents?" demanded Wilkinson.

"Not a bit of it! It was done without his knowledge, though they were sent to him at that place—Harbor Hill."

"Then who got you to do this?"

"Ford Newton!"

"Ford Newton!" gasped the physician.

"Yes, he got up the whole scheme. I merely acted for him, let him use my name, and I was a fool for that part of it—I can see that now. I had no idea it would touch any of your friends, Hammond. Who's the girl, anyhow?"

"No one whose name you are fit to repeat," was the bitter answer. "And so Ford Newton, and not Matthews, arranged for this cruel deceit? Come, Wilkinson, we'll find Newton at once. The scoundrel! If I once get my hands on him——"

"Easy now, old man," counseled the lawyer.

"I wonder why he did it—I wonder why he did it?" murmured Dr. Hammond, as he and his companion turned away.

"I can tell you why he said he did it," called Steger after them, but they paid no heed; in fact, they did not fully catch his words.

Dr. Hammond walked on so fast that Wilkinson was forced to beg him to slacken his pace.

"I'm not in trim for a Marathon," the lawyer expostulated. "I'm not in your training, Hammond. Jove, but you're anxious!"

"So would you be, if you'd been living on the edge of hell for six months, and suddenly saw a way to get to heaven."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"Yes! This knowledge is what's been keeping Jess away from me. Now I can prove it a lie!"

"But you haven't anything to offer in its place; with this disproved, the knowledge of her parentage is as obscure as ever."

"I don't want anything in the place of this. I don't care how obscure it is—and, I guess now, Jess doesn't, either. She will be content to remain as she is—Jess of Harbor Hill. She won't refuse me again! I won't allow it!"

"Jove! What a thing it is to be young, and—in love!" murmured the gray-haired lawyer, with a little laugh. "There you go again, Hammond, running as if you had to catch a train!"

"I can't help it. I must see Newton, and find out why he did this awful thing. God! It's been eating away on Jess like some horrible cancer!"

Newton was not at his lodgings, and they tried several of his clubs without success. It was not until night that they located him. He came to his rooms shortly before they called there a second time.

Something in the manner of Dr. Hammond or Wilkinson must have apprised Newton that there was more than usual import in the call. He greeted them coldly, and there was a look of apprehension in his eyes.

"Why did you do it?" asked the physician, without preliminary, as he thrust the pasted scraps of paper before Newton's face. "Why, in the name of God?" Newton understood that the game was up.

"To save my friend from an alliance with a lighthouse keeper's stray child," was the brutal answer. "I did not want to see Harry Matthews spoil his life by a chance flirtation. That is why I arranged to have that proof sent to him. He never knew—he does not yet know—that it is false."

"But he soon will know," spoke the lawyer significantly.

"I suppose so," was the gloomy answer. "It's all up now."

Dr. Hammond had not said anything since his first question. Slowly he gathered up the papers. It had been easier than he expected. Wilkinson noticed that the physician's hands were trembling. Then he saw that his fists were clenched, and so tightly, that it was the muscular tremor which shook them—not nervousness. The doctor was strangely pale. He wet his lips several times before speaking.

"You say you did this for the sake of your friend?" he asked at length.

"Yes—I meant it for the best. I wanted to save Harry Matthews. He would have spoiled his life by marrying that girl, and the fool may do it yet. I understand he's gone back down there—to her."

There was a sneer in his voice.

"You think your friend would ruin his life by marrying Miss Blowden?" asked the doctor, still in that quiet but ominous voice.

"I do. She may be all right, but she isn't fit to marry into one of the oldest and most aristocratic families of the State. I tried to stop Harry's foolishness, but it looks as if even the knowledge that the girl is a nobody, would have no effect. When he knows the truth—that is, that this supposed proof doesn't amount to anything—well——" Once more Newton shrugged his shoulders.

Dr. Hammond took one step forward. Apprehensively Wilkinson stretched out his hand to halt him. He was too late.

"You unnamable beast!" cried the physician hoarsely, and then his fist, sent with all the power pent up within him, crashed into the face of Ford Newton, who fell over backward like a log.

"Come," said the doctor in a gentle voice, and Wilkinson followed him from the room.

CHAPTER XXIII

"I LOVE YOU!"

MATTHEWS paced restlessly up and down the moonlit sands. It was full an hour early of the time appointed by Jess, yet impatiently he looked at his watch, and wondered why the minutes sped no faster. He strolled toward the Black Rocks that reared up fantastically on the beach, then, knowing the time of tryst was not yet, he turned once more aside, and glanced toward the tower whence shone a flashing light, like some great eye watching over the deep.

"I don't see any use in meeting her," he murmured, as he looked at his watch again. "She has as good as told me that there is no hope for me—and yet——"

He threw up his head with a sudden air, as though somehow, a voice had called to him. Then he laughed mirthlessly.

Once more he neared the rocks, and there came to him the memory of the time he had unwittingly

hidden there and listened to another man's confession of love. There came to his heart a hot sense of shame, as he recalled the resolve he had made on that occasion. No longer could he think of Jess as he had done. Altogether he had changed regarding her.

Then he brought to mind how his love had grown until it overmastered him—until it had changed from fervid passion into a desire that was pure and noble. And then came the revelation—his own terrible surprise—the mocking of Newton—his own resolve, that, come what might, he would wed Jess.

And then her own calm words of refusal—they were final—he realized that. But why should she want him to come to Harbor Hill? Why lead him on, if there was no hope? Yet it was not leading him on—he realized that. He realized, too, that the regard Jess felt for him could never be changed into the affection for which he craved.

He realized fully now, and perhaps for the first time, that his fierce passion and longing for Jess had become a saner and nobler regard. It was as if his old feeling had died, and, in dying, had made him a different man.

Oh! if only Helen had not changed! If she could have kept her health and her beauty! Could it be expected of him to mate with an invalid? He, who was so fond of the red blood of life? He

scarcely dared answer himself, yet he knew he *had* answered in the negative.

And then Jess came into his life. Now he felt that she was about to leave it—who would take her place? If only Helen——

But, if Jess no longer cared for him—nay, she never had cared, Matthews felt that, not in the way that counted with him—she never had, and he knew it—why, then, had she sent for him—and so earnestly?

"Oh!" The exclamation escaped from him impatiently. Again he glanced at the time. It wanted a full half hour yet. The moon had foreshortened the shadows of the Black Rocks.

"I wonder if she is going to plead for Helen?" mused Matthews. "Poor Helen—if things had only been different—if she had kept her health—but I couldn't mate with a woman who would tie me down with life-long invalidism!"

His thoughts were in a new channel now. He recalled the days when Helen had been all in all to him, and, as he saw her, in his mind's eye, as she was then, a laughing girl, filled with life and boundless energy—with the color coming and going in her cheeks—her sparkling eyes—the lips that seemed made for others to long for—her lithesome step——

And the change—when disease had stricken her—when she was all but a cripple—when the smooth-

ness of her cheeks had become—wrinkles; and her red lips—pale; her sparkling eyes—dull!

“She ought to be here soon now,” murmured Matthews, and he fumbled with his watch. “She said eight, and it only lacks ten minutes now. I’ve a notion to go to the cottage and have done with it! Yet she made me promise to wait by the rocks. I wonder if she knows what I once heard—hidden there? I wonder if she ever suspects why I do not go on with the quest? It must have been about here that I threw away those horrible papers. Jove, I never thought it would turn out so! Well, they’re at the bottom of the sea by now.”

The minutes ticked off. Matthews, approaching the limit of the restless path of pacing he had marked out for himself, turned back, and once more headed for the rocks.

Two figures stole from the lighthouse cottage. Their forms were concealed by long, black cloaks, and, while one walked on with confident tread, the other hung timidly back.

“Come,” whispered the foremost figure. “It is nearly time.”

“Yes, I—I know. But I’m afraid. Oh, suppose he should not be there?”

“Of course he is there! Now go on! I will come no farther. Remember that I cannot hear what you

say—or see what you do. I will be both deaf and blind, only——”

“Only what, dear?”

“You must tell me all about it—afterward.”

“I will. Oh, don’t leave me! I am so afraid!”

“Nonsense! It is too late to retreat now. Go on, and—God bless you, and make you happy!”

The bold one turned back. The timid one hesitated a moment, seemed as if she would turn and join her companion, and then, with a little catch in her breath, like a sob, she turned her face resolutely toward the Black Rocks, and—walked on.

Nearer she came to the waiting man. He heard the crunching of the shells and pebbles of the beach. He turned quickly, and his gaze, that had been roving over the sea, came back. He saw the approaching figure, and hurried toward it.

“Ah, you have come! I’ve been wondering——”

The light scarf, which the girl had thrown over her head fell to her shoulders. She raised her face and looked at the man. Her abundant hair, loosely coiled, was like a halo about her. The bright eyes were brighter as the moon shone into them.

“Helen!” gasped Matthews. “Helen! Here, and—and——”

“Harry!” she whispered, and though for a moment it seemed as if she would turn back, she mastered her desire to retreat, and held out her arms.

"Helen!" he repeated. "What has happened?"

"Oh, Harry!" she cried. "Can you forgive me for coming to seek you? I know it seems awful, but——"

Wonderingly, he approached her. The struggle that had been going on within him was renewed a thousand-fold. In an instant the love that had lain dormant was revived like some wonderful plant resurrected at the lightning's stroke.

"Helen! Is it really you—as you used to be, or—or——"

"It is no dream of the moon," she whispered. "I am myself again. I am well—cured—cured by the magic of this wonderful doctor here. Oh, Harry—and yet when I think that I have come out to meet you in this way, I—I——"

He had her in his arms now, and her words were choked with kisses. He held her close.

"I love you—I love you!" he whispered.

And the moon cast about them a mantle of silver, while the waves broke gently on the beach, seeming to murmur an accompaniment to the words of the man, as, over and over again he said:

"I love you! I love you!"

Love had come into its own again.

CHAPTER XXIV

HOMeward BOUND

THE storm had broken. From the northeast came a wind full of fury, lashing the waters of the bay into great waves, and whipping their crests into foam and spume, which the gale tore off and sent spinning inland, snarling and moaning because there was not something more substantial with which to play—something which might be wrecked, and lashed and ripped and splintered apart. For the slumbering giant had awakened, and the ocean was in the throes of wrath.

There had been storm warnings up along the coast for the past few days, and such shipping as made its port in the bay of Harbor Hill was riding now at double cables, with the best bowers deep in the sand below the billowing waves.

Sheltered by the tongues of land, one of which held the lighthouse, there was little danger to the schooners in the bay unless the wind should shift, and there was little likelihood of that. And for those who went down to the sea in the ships that

were now outside the harbor, it was well for them to keep clear of the coast, for, even the most powerful light was hard to see in the driving rain that accompanied the storm.

How it did rain! In great sheets the drops were driven by the gale until, as they dashed on the windows of the cottage, and hurled themselves against the thick lenses of the lantern, they sounded like hailstones.

"One of th' wust storms we've had," remarked Jed Blowden, as he sat looking from the windows of the cottage. "An' so sudden as it come on. Why, last night th' moon were never brighter."

"Nor more lovely," added Helen Byington, who sat at the side of the fireplace, looking occasionally at Harry Matthews, who was opposite her.

"Only for the strong light of the moon, I would never have known you, when you came up to me, Helen," whispered Matthews to her.

"Oh, don't remind me that I came out to you," she said in a low voice, and her cheeks were red, but not from the heat of the little blaze on the hearth, which Jed had kindled because of the chilling storm.

"I shall always think of you as you looked then," Matthews said, but so that only Helen could hear his voice.

Jess came back from the window against which

she had been leaning, watching the drops dash themselves impotently upon the glass.

"You two silly folks are doomed for at least two more days here," she announced. "The storm won't be over until then."

"Oh, it's dreadful to have put you and Daddy Jed to all this trouble," said Helen. Following her meeting on the sands with her lover the previous night, she and Matthews had taken shelter in the cottage, for the rain came up suddenly. Then, as the storm grew worse, Jess had insisted that they both remain. She shared her room with Helen, and Matthews was given a little apartment where a couch bed was made up for him.

"Wa'al, let it rain!" announced Jed, as he filled a pipe with fresh tobacco and lighted it from a splinter on the hearth. "We're snug an' warm here. It must be pretty bad out t' sea. I hope th' lamp burns clear t'-night, though it can't be seen fur—'count of th' rain. Guess I'll git in some more wood from the shed."

"I'll help," volunteered Matthews, following him outside. "I've a good notion to make a try to get to the village. I ought to send some word to Boston."

"Wa'al, ef ye really got t' go, I kin fix ye up with my oilskins," spoke Jed, "but they leak considerable,

an' ye'll be wet through 'fore ye've gone ten yards.

"Oh, well, it's not important. I suppose I can stay, only I don't like to bother you."

"Pshaw! 'Tain't no bother at all. It's a pleasure t' hev ye here. It's sort of lonesome fer Jess—she ain't been herself lately. There's suthin' broodin' on her mind, an' I reckon you know what 'tis." His manner changed suddenly. It was the first opportunity Jed had had to speak alone to Matthews.

"I?" queried Harry wonderingly.

"Yes; I've been waitin' fer a chance t' speak t' ye about it. First along I allowed as how it were some trick ye were tryin', but I've changed my mind since, an' now that Doc Hammond has gone t' Boston t' try t' find th' rascally lawyer that writ th' papers, maybe things'll come out right."

Matthews, who had stooped over to gather up an armful of wood, suddenly straightened up.

"I—I'm afraid I don't quite understand you," he said.

"It's about them papers," said Jed simply. "Them papers that I found on the sand—all torn up," and then, in simple language, he told Matthews his story, to the great surprise of him who had undertaken the peculiar quest for Jess.

"And she has known it all this while," murmured Matthews at length, "yet she never said anything?"

"Yep; she's knowed it," agreed Jed. "But I believe it a lie, don't you?"

"God knows I wish I could! But I have no reason to think so. Yet what does it matter? Jess is Jess—she never can be any one else, no matter who her parents are, God bless her!"

"Aye, aye, sir! God bless her! An' God forgive me fer thinkin' hard ag'in you, sir. I reckoned first that you had laid that plot t' give Jess a bad name, so's t'—wa'al, ye know what men do—sometimes."

"Yes." The answer was low.

"But even ef ye did it in good faith, I believe it's a lie. An' so does Doc. Hammond. Th' lawyer feller whose name was writ on th' papers is a scoundrel, Doc. says. He used to know him."

They gathered up the armfuls of wood, and carried them into the sitting room, where they were tossed into the big box beside the hearth, on which the blaze now roared up the chimney because of the powerful draught of wind.

Jess and Helen had gone into another room. On the face of Helen, rejuvenated as it was by the almost magical skill of Dr. Hammond, there was a greater look of happiness than it had worn in many months.

"Oh, you haven't told the half of it yet, I'm sure," said Jess. "Oh, I'm so glad it turned out all right!

I didn't know, after I planned it, whether it would work out as I wanted it to or not."

"But it did, Jess, and we owe it all to you."

"Then everything is all right?"

"Yes, and we are to be married this fall—Harry and I. Oh, I'm so happy!"

"I knew he always loved you," said Jess simply.

A blast shook the cottage as though some giant hand had grasped it.

"Will you be happier when Dr. Hammond comes back?" asked Helen softly, as they gathered closer to each other.

"No—that is, I don't know." Jess was staring out into the storm.

"Jess, dear," and Helen put her arms around her companion's waist, "don't you think you will ever be able to tell me something, such as I have told you—something about you and the doctor?"

Jess shook her head.

"I—I shall never marry," she whispered softly, "never." And she turned her gaze away from Helen's happy eyes.

Such was the fury of the storm that Matthews decided not to attempt to leave the lighthouse. It was quite a tramp to the village, and the oilskins owned by the keeper, having seen much service, were not very good. Jed had little use for them, and for several years had not replaced the old ones by a new

outfit. To don them would afford little protection, and Matthews would have been drenched. Then, too, there was no need of his going to the lonely room he had temporarily engaged when he came down in answer to the summons of Jess. Besides, he did not want to go away from his newly-found happiness.

For in Helen there was newly-found love and delight. She was more beautiful than ever, and all his old longing had come back when he saw her standing before him on the moonlit beach. The storm seemed like a kind fate to him now, for it enabled them to be together.

And, as the day passed, and night settled down, with no cessation to the gale, the two lovers in the lighthouse found much to talk about—to make their new plans for the revived future which Jess had brought about for them.

The Boston express, on which Dr. Hammond was returning to Portaby, was held up some miles away from that town, by a landslide, which covered the tracks several feet deep with wet sand and earth.

"What time will we get in?" asked the physician, as he alighted and tried to shelter himself under his umbrella while talking to the conductor, who was nervously directing the foreman of a gang of laborers.

"No telling," was the curt answer. "Lucky if we make it at midnight."

"Then there'll be no chance of my getting to Harbor Hill to-night," mused the doctor, as he went back into the car. His hand sought a packet of papers in a case in an inner pocket—papers which he was anxious to deliver to Jess, for they revealed the lie contained in the documents Steger had forged. Wilkinson and Dr. Hammond had forced that tricky politician to sign a complete confession before the physician left Boston, giving the story of his own duplicity and Newton's vile plot.

Slowly the train crawled forward over the tracks which had been cleared of debris, but which were still uncertain because of the washed-out roadbed. Slowly the hours slipped by, and Dr. Hammond, homeward bound, chafed at the delay. He had endeavored to send a telegram to Aunt Aurelia, asking that a man be hired to drive over and meet him in Portaby, in case his train missed the stage, which seemed likely, even when the doctor had started. But the telegraph agent had informed him that because of the storm it was impossible to get a message through.

"I'll just have to take chances," mused Dr. Hammond. "But I'll get to Harbor Hill somehow to-night, and tell Jess the good news. Then—

then——” but his half-spoken words were lost in happy retrospection.

It was one o'clock in the morning when Ralph crawled down the train-steps in the midst of a driving rain and found himself in Portaby. He was the only passenger, and when he looked about the dark and deserted station, and saw not a soul, and when the train had steamed off again, in the midst of the storm, he felt a sense of loneliness that was hard to shake off.

“I suppose I could hire a carriage and drive over,” he mused, “yet the roads are almost sure to be hub-deep in mud, and I might not get through. I think I could do better in a boat. That’s what I’ll do. I’ll see if I can’t rouse up Jack Denton, and have him take me across the bay in his cutter. It’ll be rough, but not so very bad. We can keep inside the harbor, all but just for the little stretch near Hogback Shoal. Yes, I’ll rouse up Jack.”

But Jack Denton, when he had answered the summons, yawning and sleepy-eyed, flatly refused to take the doctor across the bay.

“It’s too bad a storm,” he declared. “Wait until morning, Doc.”

“I want to be there to-night,” declared the physician. “I can’t wait six hours, man! I must get there sooner than that! The storm will be worse

in the morning. Will you let me take the boat myself? I'll pay for any damages."

"It's madness!" exclaimed Jack. "Clean madness, on a night like this!"

"Madness or not, I want to go!"

"All right; you kin take her. I'll come down an' help you git started. Hug th' shore all th' way around, until you get t' Hogback Shoal. Then you'll have t' veer out, an' look sharp, for that's a bad place. But maybe you kin make it. There's lots of gasoline in th' tank. Look out for th' rocks on th' far end of th' shoal. They're only covered at very high water, an' that's likely t' come any time now. Th' tide's full about two o'clock this mornin', and that's in an hour or less. It'll be very high water, too, an' th' rocks will be under, so look out fer' em."

"I will. Is the motor working good?"

"It did yesterday. Good luck t' you," and Jack shoved out the bow of the boat, as the doctor, clad in oilskins, which the skipper had loaned him, cranked up, and listened with a thrill of pleasure to the "put-put" that told of a well-regulated engine.

For a time, after he had started, Dr. Hammond thought he would have little trouble in reaching Harbor Hill. But, as he got farther out, and felt the grip of the sea on the frail boat, noted how she was raised on a billow for a moment, and then went slid-

ing down into the trough, he knew that it was to be no child's play to make the other side of the harbor.

"Jove! But it *does* blow!" he murmured, as he dashed the water from his eyes, and tried to peer ahead through the mist. "I wonder if I can make it? But I will! I must! For Jess!"

The wind whined and moaned around the little signal mast forward, and whistled through the stays that held it in place. At the top swung a storm lantern, for a light on the bow could not have been seen half the time, as the little craft was hidden in the hollows of the waves.

The motor coughed, choked and spluttered as a thing alive. The sea dashed over it, wetting it with a salty spray, but the staunch little engine seemed to dash the drops aside, and chugged away harder than before.

Once a staggering sea almost engulfed the boat, and for a moment the doctor feared she would not rise from it. But she shook herself from stem to stern, plunged on through a swirling mass of foam-capped green water, stuck her nose out on the other side, and moved on triumphantly.

"That's the way to do it!" cried the doctor, as he arose and peered forward through the storm.

On staggered the boat. She got the full force of the wind now, and her prow was almost turned aside by the sweep of the gale, and the impact of the slam-

ming, banging seas. There was water in the cockpit, and in the space forward, where the doctor stood to steer. The flywheel was running in a bath of salt water, and cast up a spray which was like a rain of big drops from some gigantic pin-wheel.

The doctor stood with his feet braced well apart, and clung to the jerking wheel. Now and then, as the engine coughed and spluttered unevenly, as though about to give up the fight, he glanced apprehensively back into the darkness at it, but, as if reassured, like some faithful dog, by a glance from its master, the machine caught up the broken strain of its song of progress, and labored on.

"If she stops, I'm done for," murmured the physician. "I'll be swamped if we can't keep going. Jove! I'll have to bail her out soon."

The water in the boat was half way to his knees, and the shipping of a few more of the staggering seas would mean serious trouble.

"I ought to be somewhere near the Hogback Shoal," mused the doctor a little later, as he endeavored to pierce the rain and spume-filled darkness.

There came into his face the stinging spray whipped from the crest of a wave. A billow struck the staunch little craft a quartering blow, and sent the doctor reeling. But he clung to the wheel.

The boat staggered like a poled ox, and then

gallantly recovered herself, and plunged again into the swirling mass of waters.

"The Hogback Shoal—I must look out for that," murmured the doctor. "I think—"

The head of the boat went suddenly up, as though lifted by a gigantic wave. A shudder passed through her whole length. Her keel scraped on something that sent a thrill of terror to the heart of the man at the wheel.

Then came a crash—a splintering, rending crash! It was as if the boat cried out in her agony. The engine stopped as though in surprise, coughed, wheezed, and then was—still.

Down settled the craft with a jarring thud which came to the doctor's ears even above the howl of the storm. There was a further rending of her timbers. She seemed to fall apart, and for a moment lay quiet—as still in that swirl of angry waters as the cruel black rocks upon which she had crashed.

The next moment, flung overboard by a great wave, his hands torn from the steering wheel by the power of the sea, Dr. Hammond was floundering in the midst of the seething currents about Hogback Shoal. His boat had been spitted upon the treacherous rocks.

CHAPTER XXV

OUT OF THE STORM

JED BLOWDEN, attending his lamp in the tower of the lighthouse, listened intently. Above the roar of the storm above the beating on the rain on the glass, and the pounding of the waves on the beach, he thought he heard a cry in the night. He listened again. It seemed to be repeated.

"By gum, it *do* sound like some one callin'," he murmured. He trimmed the big wicks, saw that the lamp would burn for some time without attention, and then made his way slowly down the stairs of the tower. He slipped out of a side door, and, even sheltered as it was from the blast, the portal was flung back so violently against him, that he had all he could do to close it.

"By Humphrey! but it is blowin'!" he muttered. "I——"

He paused suddenly. The cry came more plainly to him now, even above the noise of the storm, for the wind was blowing right into his face.

"There's some one on Hogback Rocks!" exclaimed the old man. "Some boat's been split on 'em, sure as fate! An' th' tide will soon be washin' over 'em! They'll be all under water in this blow. Some one's on Hogback Rocks!"

Jed Blowden rushed back into the cottage. He was pounding on the door of the room where Matthews slept.

"Yes! What is it?"

"There's some sort of a wreck—some one's on th' Hogback Rocks! They'll have t' be took off mighty quick, for th' tide'll soon be at flood, an' then it'll be all up with 'em! Guess ye'll have t' run over t' th' village, an' have Hank Stickleton telephone t' th' life-savers. They kin git there on time—maybe!"

Matthews, hurriedly dressing, opened his door. There was a movement at the portal of the chamber where Jess and Helen roomed. Jess came out. She was fully clothed, and was slipping on a waterproof cloak.

"I haven't been asleep," she said. "The wind was too noisy. What is it, Daddy Jed?"

"Some one on Hogback Rocks! I was jest tellin' Mr. Matthews he'd better go have Hank telephone fer th' life-savers. There may be time 'fore high water t' save 'em!"

He moved toward the outer side door. As he

opened it slightly, there came in on the wings of the wind the cry from the night.

"Hear 'em?" asked Jed.

Jess shuddered, and her face grew pale. The angry sea always made her afraid—ever since she had been a little child.

"I'll go at once," said Matthews. "Where are the oilskins, Daddy Jed? They'll be some help."

"Wait a moment!" exclaimed Jess. "Daddy—Mr. Matthews—there will be no time for the life-savers! See, it is nearly two o'clock now. The tide is high at ten minutes after. By the time they get there the rocks will be under water."

"It's th' only way," said Jed helplessly.

"No!" cried Jess. "We, here, must save whoever it is!"

"Save them from here?" repeated Matthews. "How can we?"

"In my dory! I can easily row out. It's pretty well sheltered until I get close to the rocks. I'll go!"

"No—th' storm's too awful!" cried Jed.

"But, Daddy, we can't let the poor souls drown! It may be a woman. There may be a little child! I must go!"

"No! No!" cried the old man protestingly, and he held out a detaining hand.

"I *must* go, Daddy," said Jess gently, and she

kissed him. The old keeper dropped his hand dejectedly.

"Oh, if I wasn't so old," he muttered helplessly.

Jess took from a nail a sou'wester hat, and tied the strings under her chin. Then, from a rack on the wall she took a pair of oars. Harry Matthews stepped up beside her, and took down another pair.

"What are you going to do?" she asked quietly.

"I'm going with you—of course," he answered simply.

"Very well. Perhaps it will be better. We must lose no time—and, Daddy, if Helen wakes up—don't tell her where we have gone."

She slipped from the house, with Matthews at her side. Not until they got beyond the shelter of the house and light tower did they feel the full force of the storm. Then it almost took away their breaths. The wind whipped the rain into their faces with stinging force.

The dory was on the float, for, had it been tied alongside the dock, it would have been pounded to pieces against the spiles. Between them they managed to get it into the water, and, with a skill born of long practice, Jess quickly sent it away from the bobbing float. They dipped their oars into the water and pulled lustily, in the path of the finger of light sent out from the lantern in the tower.

No small boat, save a dory, could have lived on

the bay that night, for, even in the sheltered cove, the waves were very high. But the peculiar shape of the little boat made it fairly safe.

"Can you hear the cries?" asked Jess, when they had rowed on some little time.

"Yes, now and then, when the wind blows them to me," answered Matthews. "I thought I saw a glimpse of a light, too."

"Yes. Oh, Harry, I hope we are in time!"

Matthews had been a good oarsman in his day, and, though all his skill had not left him, he was scarcely a match for Jess. How magnificently she pulled! with strong, even strokes—as full in their power as were Matthews' own, and he was counted an athlete.

"Help! Help!"

The wind caught the words, and hurled them on the strained ears of the rescuers. Now and then, when there came a lull in the sheets of rain, a bobbing light could be seen.

"I think it's a lantern on a boat!" panted Jess. "It moves about like that."

"Probably some small craft is spitted on the rocks, and the poor souls are clinging to what is left of the wreck," volunteered Matthews.

But they had little breath for talking. The sweep of the oars took all their strength and attention. Now they would be down in a hollow of the sea,

and again on the crest of a wave, a crest so sharp and narrow that there was no water remaining in which to dip the broad blades. It was as if they were poised on the ridge of a liquid green mountain. Then, once more, they would slide downward with a sensation as though they would not stop until they reached the bottom.

The arms and back of Jess ached woefully. Matthews found himself counting the strokes, as he had done in the eight-oared shell at college, when he felt that he could not take another pull. He seemed to be in a sort of trance—as though his body was in the boat, and his soul elsewhere. He caught himself thinking that three more strokes would put him up to the wrecked boat; then he mentally increased the number to five—to ten—to twenty—to fifty.

Still they labored on through the storm; labored on, hearing, now and then, that call for help—that feeble cry in the riot of the wind and rain and tumbling waves—that pitiful appeal—an appeal to the god of the sea. A wave dashed its stinging crest over them, but it could drench them no more than they were already, for the driving rain had soaked them through and through.

“A little more on your right,” Jess once directed Matthews, after a glance thrown over her shoulder to where she saw the rocks to be. She could have

gone to them on the darkest night, for she knew their location, and now she had the gleam in the tower of the lighthouse, which she kept in the proper course with a range light, situated farther up on the cliff back of Harbor Hill. Then, too, the occasional gleam from the bobbing light on Hogback Rocks guided her.

"Help! Help! Help!"

Once more came the despairing cry.

"Oh, if we are only in time!" gasped Jess shudderingly.

She looked over her shoulder once more. Something dim, and moving violently about, loomed up in the darkness. Back of it there was a small spot of blackness amid a swirl and smother of white foam. Jess knew the small point to be the highest pinnacle of the Hogback Rocks. The moving object was the boat spitted upon them. It was almost high water now. Soon the jagged stones would be completely covered.

"A few strokes more," she panted to Matthews. "Then—back water!"

"Help! Help!"

Again the despairing cry.

"We're coming!" shouted Jess. "Hold on! We are coming!"

"How many are there of you?" asked Matthews, as he thought of the smallness of the rescuing dory.

"I'm here alone—my boat hit the rock—it's jammed in between two points! I managed to get a hold after being tossed overboard! I can't stay much longer—the water is rushing——" The words were lost in a gurgle, horrible to hear. Then came: "I'm Dr. Hammond. Tell——"

The sea swallowed up the remainder.

But Jess had heard!

"Ralph! It's Ralph!" she screamed. "We must save him! It's Ralph! Do you hear, Harry? It's Ralph! Ralph!"

"He's under—he's gone!" cried Matthews hoarsely.

"But we must save him! We can get him! Pull closer to the wreck!"

"But we'll stave in this boat—it's dangerous—you'll be drowned, Jess! We daren't go any closer to the rocks! You'll be killed!"

"What do I care!" she retorted. "We've got to save him! Don't you understand! It's Ralph! Ralph! He's there!"

She looked eagerly into the swirl of waters, and in the dim, phosphorescent light that seemed to emanate from the waves, Matthews could see on her face a mingled look of love and fear.

"God help him!" murmured Jess. "We must save him! Row, Harry! Row for your life! For his! Two more strokes and we are there! Oh, Ralph!

Ralph!" she screamed above the turmoil of the sea, "we are coming—we are coming. Swim out to us! Don't give up! We are here! We are here!"

There was no answer. The little bobbing light had disappeared. Around them the storm raged still more furiously, seeming to envelop them in a winding sheet of foam. With an icy fear clutching at her heart, Jess leaned over the side of the dory.

"He—he's gone!" faltered Matthews brokenly.

"No—no!" sobbed Jess. "We *must* save him! God wouldn't let him be taken that way when—when—I——"

The wind, with a howl as of delight at her anguish, whipped the words from her mouth. She tossed the hair back out of her eyes—she dashed the salt water from them.

Once more she peered into the seething swirl of foam and blackness about the rocks and shoal.

"Oh, God—God!" she prayed.

Something black floated past her as she leaned over—something black that was tossed up and down by the angry waves. It might be but a piece of the wreckage—it might be——

Jess drew in her oars and made a desperate grasp for it. Her fingers met the wet and sodden clothing of a body.

"Oh, God!" she moaned again, but her strength



"QUICK HARRY—HELP ME!" SHE PANTED.
"I—I HAVE HIM!"

did not go from her, and she leaned back and pulled lustily.

"Quick—Harry—help me!" she panted. "I—I have him!"

Matthews sprang to her side. Together they got the unconscious physician into the dory. They laid him tenderly in the bottom, while Jess held his head in her arms, brushed back the hair from the wet face—and kissed him on the salty lips.

"Good God!" gasped Matthews. "Is—is he dead?"

Jess drew the head closer to her bosom. She wanted to cry, to scream, yet she called first to Matthews:

"Put out your oars—row away, or we'll be on the rocks too! Row, Harry, row! We're being sucked into the swirl! Row!"

With new-born strength, Matthews sent the dory away from the dangerous shoal. Jess still knelt with the head of the doctor in her arms. Once more she kissed the lips that she feared were stilled forever. She thought, now, that he would never know that she——

But there was a convulsive movement of the inert form. A shudder seemed to run through it. In the dull gleam of the storm Jess could see the eyes slowly open. The lips parted—the lips she had

kissed—words came—hoarse words, choked by the sea water.

“Oh, Jess—is it you? Where am I? But I know. I’m all right, now. You—you came just in time! I couldn’t hold on any longer. I—I had to let go—I was in the sea—in the storm—I felt myself going down—I was helpless—going down into the depths—and then——” He ceased, and gasped for breath.

“I caught hold of you—just in time,” said Jess. “Oh, Ralph, I thought you were gone forever! Are you all right? Are you hurt? Tell me—are—are you all right?”

She took her arms from him, for he could sit up now. She looked into his eyes, even in the darkness of the storm, and there was a great prayer in her heart.

“Tell me you are all right!” she begged.

“Yes—yes—I am,” he answered feebly. “Where am I?”

“In my dory! Oh, thank God, you’re alive! Row! Row!” she called frantically to Matthews.

How they got the dory back through the ever-increasing storm, they never knew, but they did, though wrenched and aching arms were tried to their limit, and the waves sought again and again to swamp the staunch little craft, or to tear the oars from the benumbed hands. But Jess and Matthews rowed on, until they were sheltered by the dock.

Dr. Hammond had so far recovered that he was able to get out of the dory with the help of Matthews. Then, when the boat had been pulled up on the float they went staggering up to the cottage. They found Daddy Jed anxiously waiting for them, with a steaming pot of coffee on the stove.

"Wa'al, by Humphrey!" he exclaimed, as he recognized the rescued one. "Doc. Hammond! An' they brought you back out of th' storm, eh?"

"Yes," he answered slowly, "out of the storm!" And his eyes rested on Jess. The door of the other room opened, and Helen, with wonder in her bright eyes, looked out inquiringly. She had just awakened.

"What—what?" she began, in some alarm.

"Just a little midnight rescue scene, which perhaps S. Rufus may use in one of his plays," explained Matthews with a laugh—a laugh that told of racked nerves.

"It was a good setting for a tank drama, when that motor boat went split against the rocks," said the doctor. "I thought I knew the bay, but I must have become confused and got too close to the shoal. But, I'm safely back."

To Matthews the doctor held out his dripping hands. He was wrapped in some blankets—so was Matthews—and of the three, only Jess wore ordinary habiliments, for Daddy Jed's wardrobe was too

limited for the emergency of two rain-soaked men.

Once he was warm and dry, Dr. Hammond told of his trip from Boston, of how he had been delayed, but had determined to reach Harbor Hill before morning, and then of the desperate trip across the bay alone in the motor boat.

As he finished his narrative, Dr. Hammond glanced at the girl for whom he had risked so much. There was that in his manner which seemed to savor of apprehension, as he noted the presence of Matthews in the lighthouse, but one look at the glorified and happy face of Helen, and a sight of the tender, caressing air of Matthews toward her, lulled the physician's suspicions to rest.

The lighthouse keeper appeared anxious about something. He seemed to want to ask the doctor a question, but forebore. The physician, however, noticed his manner.

"It's all right, Daddy Jed!" he exclaimed cheerfully.

"It is? Hurray! By Humphrey! Thank God! Then it's a lie?" For Dr. Hammond understood what was meant. "It's a lie!"

"Every word of it, Daddy Jed. I have the papers in my coat. I guess we can read them, for I put them inside my leather medicine case, and it's water-proof."

Jess looked on wonderingly, while the doctor took up his soaked garment and explored the pockets.

And then, while the storm lashed itself into still greater fury outside the lighthouse, Dr. Hammond spread out before Jess and the others, the proofs he had obtained, of the lying story concocted by Newton and Steger.

"And Ford did that!" muttered Matthews. "God forgive him. I can't!"

Jess was weeping on the shoulder of Daddy Jed. She could scarcely believe the good news that had come to her out of the storm.

"There, there, Jess, gal!" said the old lighthouse keeper gently, as he patted her shoulders. "It's all right; all right. I ain't goin' t' lose my Jess, arter all. I knowed it were a lie—I knowed it. I've got my Jess ag'in—th' same Jess I picked up on th' beach that night in a storm—picked ye up, jest as if ye was a big, red crab—so I did—a big, red crab!"

"Oh, Daddy Jed! Daddy Jed!" was all Jess could murmur, as she clung to him.

They sat up all the rest of that night, for no one cared to sleep—there was too much to talk about. And, in the morning, Captain Josiah, who was passing, was pressed into service, and sent to summon the doctor's horse and carriage.

"I'll come over again, as soon as I have some dry clothes on," he told Jess, as he departed in

his still damp garments. "I'm coming back, Jess. May I?"

"If you didn't, I'd—I'd never rescue you again!" she said laughingly, and then she ran to her own room and shut the door.

There was little more to be told of the attempt to solve the mystery. Dr. Hammond learned that Newton had planned a big business deal, which required a heavy outlay of capital. He had used up all of his own money, and considerable of Matthews's available funds, and he thought that by getting Harry and Helen to marry he would be able to command some of the large fortune which Miss Byington had in her own right. As the husband of his friend, he knew he would have a good chance, at least. That is why he was so eager to bring about a reconciliation between Harry and Helen, and why, without the knowledge of his friend, he planned such a dastardly trick against Jess. But his scheme failed.

"And so, you are still only Jess—Jess of Harbor Hill," remarked Helen Byington, a little later that day, when Matthews, too, had made a break through the storm, and the two girls were left alone with Daddy Jed. "You are still only Jess; but, if certain looks go for anything, I don't believe you'll keep that name long, dear. Wasn't it fine of him to do that for you—and to come home through all the

storm so that you might know it sooner? Wasn't it perfectly splendid?"

"Yes," answered Jess in a low voice.

"And, when you marry him, you won't be Jess of Harbor Hill any more, will you, dear? Maybe he can really find out who your parents are, now."

"It doesn't matter," was the reply. "I don't care, now," and there was a happy smile on her face. "I will always be Jess of Harbor Hill—at least to Daddy Jed."

And Jed, smoking his pipe, as he cleaned the glass of the lantern, smiled happily.

"I knowed it were a lie—a lie," he mused. "An' I have my Jess, arter all."

He looked at the framed scrap of paper—which had been taken from the tiny hand of Jess when she was washed ashore. That was all that now remained of the mystery of the sea. The efforts to solve the riddle had been futile. The ocean still held its own. The lie concocted by Newton and Steger had fallen apart of its own frailty. And Jess knew no more of who she was than she did when she began her quest.

"She's still my Jess!" murmured Jed, as he smoked on. "My Jess! that I picked up on th' beach, like she were a crab—a big, red crab—a red crab!" and he looked musingly across the storm-tossed bay.

But Jess did not always remain nameless, and of her further life you may read in the next volume of the Harbor Hill Romances, which will be entitled, "The Price of a Heart."

Of course, the story of the thrilling rescue of Dr. Hammond was soon talked about all over Harbor Hill, and also in Portaby. But of the result of his mission, only those in the secret knew.

Miss Florence Denmore, of Boston, brought her visit to an end a few days later.

"You must come again, dear," said Aunt Aurelia gently, as her visitor departed. "Dr. Ralph, perhaps, won't be so busy next time, and he can take you around more."

"No," said Miss Denmore musingly, "I hardly think he will. But I've had a very pleasant time—very pleasant," and if there was any disappointment, the smiling face of Miss Denmore did not show it.

"I allers said Jess Blowden had lots of gump-tion," remarked Hank Stickleton, to a group of cronies in his store one evening about a week later. "She certainly kin row a boat. An' that Matthews feller did pretty well, too!"

"It was great!" chimed in S. Rufus Blodgett, while Reuben Tittlemore was softly humming an operatic air. "I am going to change the ending of my melodrama," went on S. Rufus, "and put in a rescue at sea in a storm."

"Oh, ye be, eh?" exclaimed Hank. "Wa'al, Simon, you jest snake out a couple of them salt mackerel, like I told ye to an hour ago. They've got t' go t' Mrs. Newcomb's, an' ye might as well take 'em up, fer there ain't nothin' else t' do now. Git 'em out. An' you, Reuben, stop hummin' them mushy songs, an' straighten up yer counters."

Reuben cast a look of scorn at his employer, and at that moment Captain Josiah shuffled in.

"I'll have a paper of fine-cut terbacker," he said, while S. Rufus Blodgett drew up from the kit two dripping salt mackerel.

* * * * *

The moon was out, full, clear, glorious, making the sea look like a heaving bed of silver.

Over by the Black Rocks two forms were strolling, arm in arm.

"And here is where you brought them together again, Jess?" said the doctor.

"Yes," she answered softly. "And wasn't it grand, Ralph?"

"Yes, dear. And no girl but you could have done it."

"Oh, don't say that, Ralph. I—I——"

"No girl but you, Jess!" He stopped and caught her by both arms. "Jess, you are a wonderful little woman, wonderful! And to think how you braved that storm to save me!"

"Mr. Matthews helped."

"But you went first; Daddy Jed told me that. Jess, don't you know you are the bravest, dearest little woman in all the wide world!"

"Oh, Ralph!"

"You are, and now you have promised to be mine, you don't know how happy you have made me! Why, the whole aspect of life has changed for me! I shall take a new interest in my work, for my success will mean your success, too!" And now he strove to catch her closer.

"But, Ralph!" she held him back. "Ralph, my identity—if——"

"Never mention it again, Jess. What do I care for the past? It is enough for me to know that you are to be my wife! Isn't that enough for you to know, too?"

She hid her head on his shoulder.

"Yes!" she whispered.

He caught her face between his two hands and raised it up to his own. Their very souls seemed to meet in the look they gave each other. And then he kissed her.

THE END.

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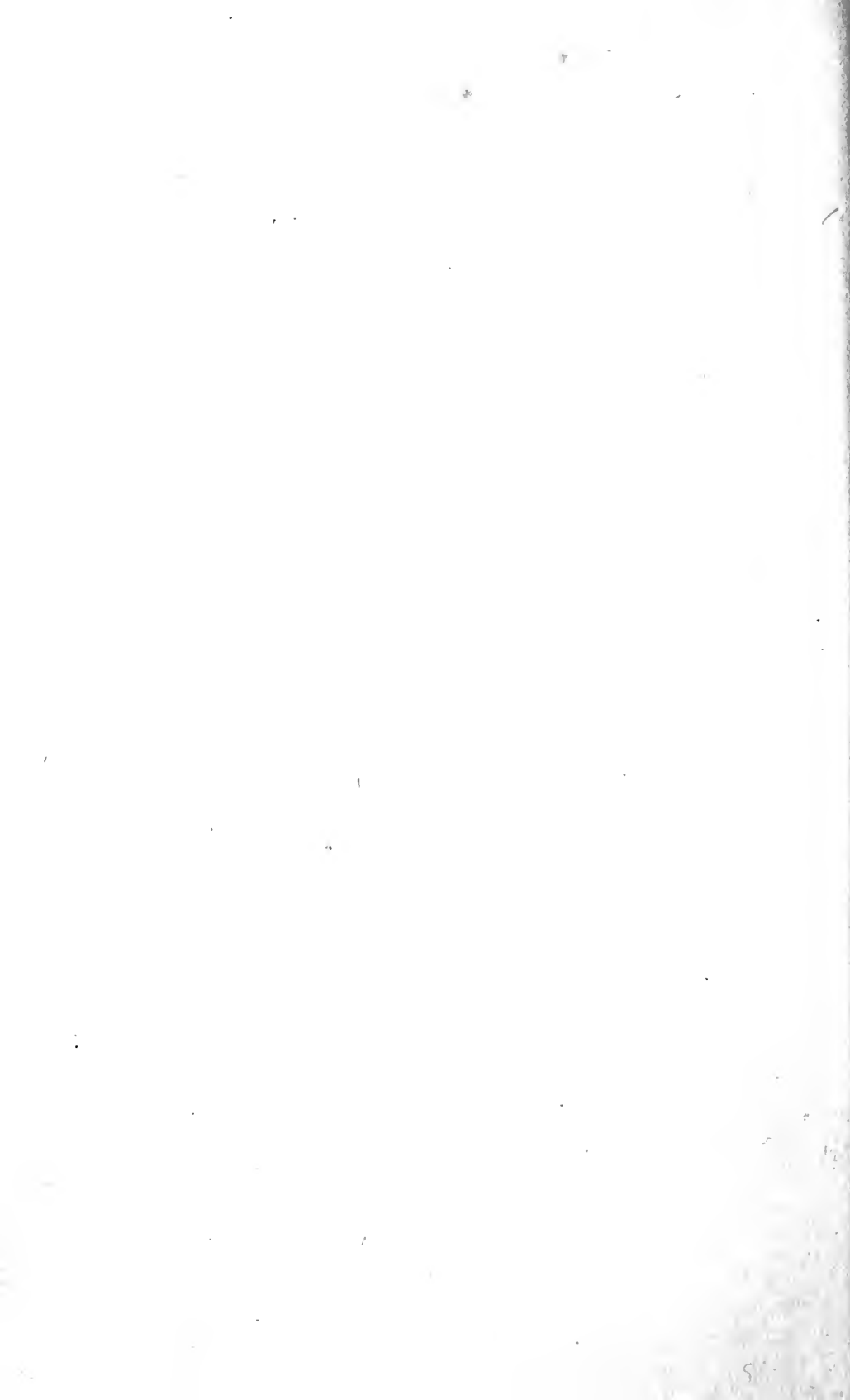
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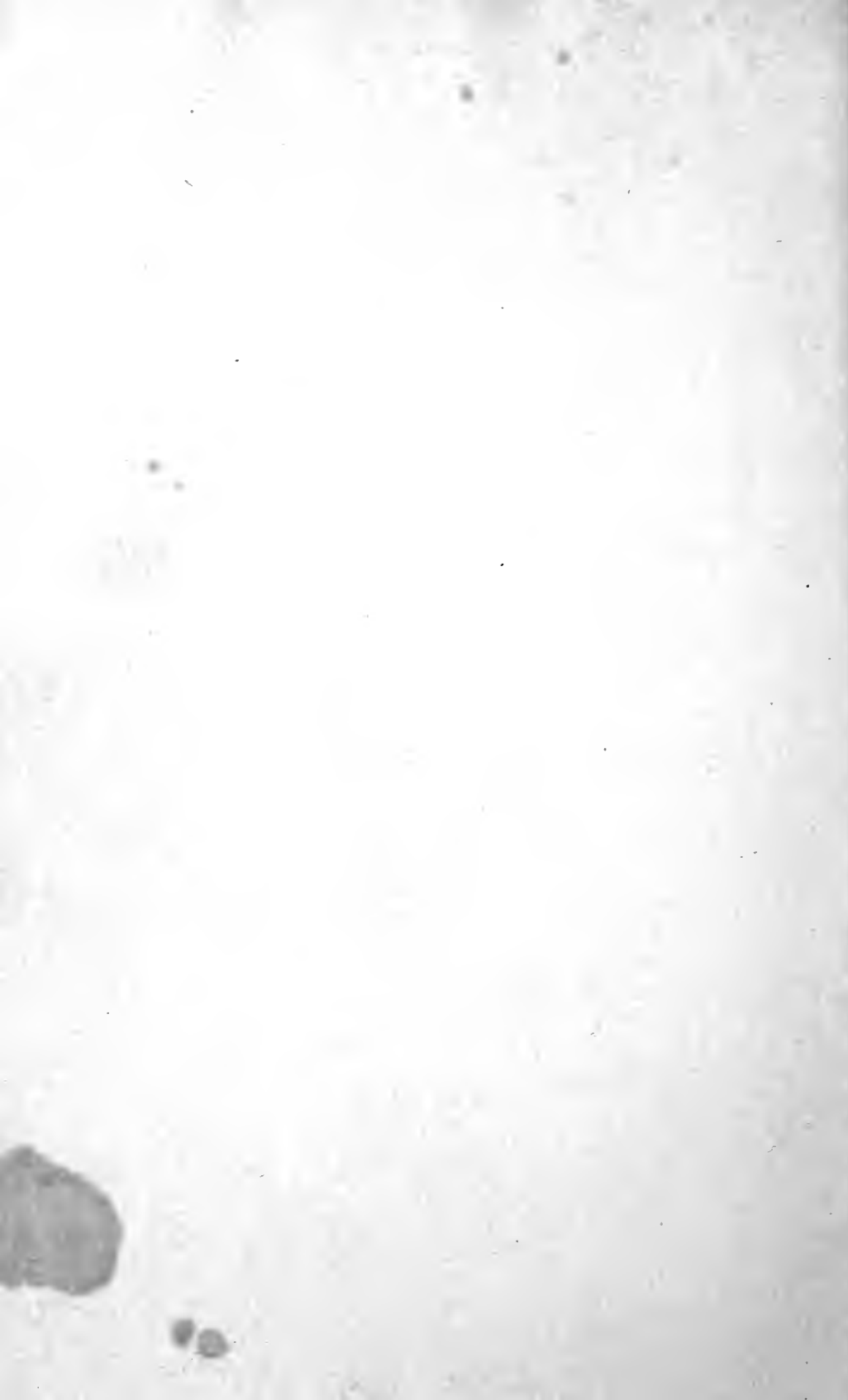
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